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COUSIN DEBORAH'S WHIM.

A Tale.

BY

MARY E. SHIPLEY,
AUTHOR OF "GABRIELLE VAUGHAN," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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“—MARVEL not, if such as bask
In purest light of innocence,
Hope against hope, in love's dear task,
Spite of all dark offence.
If they who hate the trespass most,
Yet, when all other love is lost,
Love the poor sinner, marvel not ;
Christ's mark outwears the rankest blot.

“ Oh ! might we all our lineage prove,
Give and forgive, do good and love,
By soft endearments in kind strife,
Lightening the load of daily life.

• “ There is much need ; for not as yet
Are we in shelter or repose,
The holy house is still beset
With leaguer of stern foes ;
Wild thoughts within, bad men without,
All evil spirits round about,
Are banded in unblest device
To spoil Love's earthly paradise.”

KEBLE.

COUSIN DEBORAH'S WHIM.

CHAPTER I.

"AND you really mean to say that you never had an offer, Deborah?"

"Not one."

"Well, it is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of. Why, I had refused five before I accepted John."

Cousin Deborah smiled. "Some people are more in the way of such things than others are," she said; "besides, you remember what kind of life mine was when I was young."

"Yes, I am aware there could not be many opportunities of love-making from any one, with that dreadful woman keeping you out of sight as she did. But it is absurd to talk of when you were young in that way, Deborah; you are not so exceedingly ancient now."

"Thirty-five, my dear; and you must allow that is what one calls 'getting on.'"

"Well, yes, but then 'it is never too late to mend.'"

"Then, according to your ideas, Ellen, matrimony mends all things?"

Mrs. Gibson laughed, and gave a very decided and knowing little twist to the shoulder-knot of black ribbon she was making for her little three-years-old daughter. Instead of directly answering the question she simply remarked, "Well, if you are contented, I am."

"That is a good thing."

"And you mean to say that you never yet saw any one whom you would have accepted if he had asked you?"

"That is scarcely a fair question to ask," said Cousin Deborah, while her thin cheek flushed suddenly, and she unconsciously bent her head lower over the little frock she was making.

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Gibson, feeling that her personalities had gone a little too far. Then, anxious to divert Miss Thornton's thoughts, she added, "What do you think of this bow? It seems to me even prettier than the last."

"Decidedly. Dear little Alice! I never like to see such a baby in black ribbons."

"Nor I; but what is one to do? of all the

children she was her grandpapa's pet ; and even if not, it would be the correct thing. Well, at any rate their mourning shall be as pretty as possible ; taste goes a long way in such things."

Cousin Deborah thought that if the "mourning" had been for any one very dear to Mrs. Gibson, she would scarcely have thought of making it pretty. She remembered how, when the dress-maker had brought a book of fashions with her on the only occasion when, since her childhood, she had lost a relative she loved, she had turned away in disgust, with an impatient, "Make it just as you like ; it is all the same to me ;" but then that case was different from this. She said nothing : Mrs. Gibson's last speech had set her off on a long train of thought, and there was silence in the room for a while.

It was a pretty dressing-room, one of the cosiest of the many cosy nooks in the old vicarage of Lowton. Thick curtains kept out the air, which on this stormy February night would have been an unwelcome visitor ; a cheerful fire blazed in the old-fashioned grate, its flames shining on the quaint china tiles with which all the little Gibsons had been acquainted from their earliest days of "taking notice." There was a sofa and the most comfortable of arm chairs ; one

side of the room was lined with books ; the first early snowdrops were on the table between Mrs. Gibson and her cousin : and, crowning beauty of all, in the mother's eyes at least, in the warmest corner by the sofa was a little cradle draped in dainty pink and white, wherein slumbered a tiny daughter just three weeks old, for whose christening Cousin Deborah had been persuaded to stay a fortnight longer at Lowton than she had at first intended. She was enjoying her visit, and was not sorry it should not be over just yet, though for a few minutes she had entirely forgotten where she was, and had such a preoccupied air that Mrs. Gibson did not like to disturb her, remembering her thoughtless speech.

Presently in the most prosaic manner possible, Cousin Deborah said, "Do you think, Ellen, that fifty pounds a year is a fair sum to give for the board and education of a child ?"

"It depends on circumstances, I should say," replied Mrs. Gibson, while her mental question was, "What in the world are you driving at now ?"

"Of course. But suppose you should wish to send Nelly to school when she is old enough, should you think that a fair sum to give ?"

"At first I should ; indeed, I know that

country schools—some of them pretty good, too—charge less than that. Later on I should expect to give more; but then one pays according to advantages.”

“I am thinking of a case with very few advantages; in fact, Ellen, I am not quite sure in my own mind that my dear uncle Henry gave the Parkers enough for the twenty years I was with them, and I have a horror of being unjust or in debt.”

“He gave them a thousand pounds, I believe?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, set your mind at rest, once and for all; they were paid more than twice over for anything they had spent on you. I am sure they can have no further claim on your gratitude.”

“Oh, as to gratitude,” interrupted Miss Thornton, speaking very quickly, and yet catching her breath as if almost too excited for the words to come easily, “I put that quite out of the question. They only took me because they were obliged; and they took no pains to disguise the fact. They snubbed me from first to last, and kept me in the back-ground. I was clothed in any of the cast-off garments which came within half a yard of fitting me; and as

to money, I never in all those years had anything but one half-crown, which a friend of Mrs. Parker gave to me, and which I had to forfeit to pay for a pane of glass which Edward had made me break, and then was too contemptible a sneak to own it. They did nothing to call for gratitude, and I certainly have not the slightest intention of feeling any ; I could not if I tried, and there's an end of it," said Cousin Deborah, speaking faster than ever.

"And you made yourself so useful to them, too," said Mrs. Gibson, anxious to throw oil on the troubled waters, more perhaps from the fear of waking baby than with the intention of soothing her cousin's excitement ; but she was unfeignedly sorry for her, and repeated, "You know you made yourself so useful to them."

"Of course I did ! I saved them an under nursemaid first, and a governess afterwards. I should be quite qualified to act in either capacity now if it were needful, and I could combine a little dress-making and other offices of a lady's-maid, for I had plenty of practice there."

"I am sure you don't owe them anything then."

"And I am sure too ; but would you believe it, Ellen ? that dreadful woman used to say they lost a good deal through me, because the money

they spent every year on my account might have been out at interest instead of lying idle."

"I am sure they received very good interest for all they spent on you," said Mrs. Gibson, scornfully. "Interest, indeed! Well, send them fifty pounds, and let the matter rest, Deborah; that will be interest for the twenty years, don't you see?"

"Yes; I see well enough,"

"Well, then, do it; unless you are thinking of overcoming evil with good."

"I have not arrived at that yet. Perhaps I may if ever I see them in need. No, I only want to be just, and to be sure I am out of their debt: I don't intend to give a penny more than what is right. I think I shall send Mary a cheque for five hundred pounds. She is the poorest of them all, and has seven boys; it cannot come amiss, and then I shall be easy. I think I shall do that."

"Yes, I would; and then you must not trouble yourself any more about them."

Miss Thornton was silent for a few minutes, then she broke forth: "Oh! Ellen, it seems so dreadful to be calculating like this, when if they had ever shown me the most ordinary affection, my whole life would have been at their service, gladly, thankfully——"

But here the unwonted tones were too loud for baby's peace of mind, and a very vigorous cry from the cradle put an end to the conversation. In much distress, Cousin Deborah lifted the little one from her cosy nest, and placed her in her mother's arms. She spoke no more of her wrongs that night—at least to no human ear—but her first act on going to her room was to write the cheque for five hundred pounds.

Poor Cousin Deborah! Hers had been a life from the early part of which all sweetness and brightness seemed to have been left out. Her mother had died at her birth, and when, at five years of age, she was left fatherless too, one would have thought there would have been at least compassion for her in some hearts bound to her own by ties of blood! The worst was, the ties were not very near ones. Her mother had been an only child, and her father's sister had died unmarried just before him. There was only a cousin—certainly three degrees off, but still a cousin—at all in a position to do anything for the child, and to her the dying father wrote a letter bequeathing his treasure; and then (for he was a most unworldly man) he felt he had secured a friend for Deborah, and in that assurance he went to his rest. He had married young, and was only a poor curate; then, too,

during a long illness he had been unable to perform his duties, so that at his death the sale of his books and furniture barely paid his funeral expenses and covered the few debts he left. Indeed, Mrs. Parker had been accustomed to impress on Deborah's mind (so early that it was one of her most deeply-rooted ideas) that she had had actually to pay for the journey of the nurse who had brought her, so improvident had her poor father been.

It was a sad life which the little dowerless orphan led in the house, where she was plainly told by word and deed for long weary years that she was one too many. She had a sweet, loving nature, which under favourable influences would have developed like a summer flower beneath the sun's genial rays. But there was no love or tenderness to call forth the warm impulses lying dormant in that little neglected heart. At first they had sprung up, naturally looking for response, but a sensitive child does not easily recover from a repulse, and she grew up reserved and cold.

Her name, too, she felt to be a misfortune. Certainly it has a certain grand sound of its own, apart from the old Hebrew story which has invested it with an added nobility, but it is one very difficult to abbreviate. Her young

boy-cousins called her Deb, which has not a musical sound, to say the least of it, though perhaps, except for its hardness to one's ears, it is no more abrupt than Moll or Bess, the nick-names of the cousins nearest her own age ; but it admitted of no diminutive such as theirs (for if Deb is hard, Debby is too unutterably soft) ; so while they were Molly and Bessie, she was always stiff, uncompromising Deborah, or even worse, Cousin Deborah—the “cousin” being used when she was especially out of favour, and meant to show her that she was in reality outside the circle, and, in fact, an intruder.

Now and then, when Captain Parker came home from his long voyages, she met with a little notice. He would call her to him, and remonstrate with his wife, for dressing a child with hair and complexion so dark in colours which did not suit her ; but her only reply was that she could not buy new things for her, and as all her girls were fair, she must wear what suited them. Thus her innate sense of the beautiful was cruelly outraged ; the colours she delighted in were to her forbidden things, far out of reach ; and even the luxury of a white collar or frill, to say nothing of cuffs, was denied her, on account of the expense of washing ; so that with a dingy black lace tucker at the neck

of her washed-out frocks, and with hair cut short to do away with the trouble of curls or plaits, with frocks and shoes and bonnets too big in every way—for she was but a tiny thing—the poor child had always that miserable sense of being unsuitably dressed which has so many tortures for a young heart; and as the years went on, she gradually shrank more and more into her own self, and became shy and awkward.

Once only did the little blighted rosebud have any chance of expanding under more genial influences. Once only did she know what smiles for her meant, and that was when an early friend of Mrs. Parker had come to spend a week there. Cousin Deborah could never forget that week. She dwelt lovingly on the remembrance of a gentle form bending over her little bed at night. She could recall the very pressure of strong protecting arms round her, which once—once only—she had felt, and the dear words “My darling,” which perhaps had been uttered unconsciously, sank deep into the child’s warm, receptive nature, and stayed there—something too sweet to be repeated, something to be treasured and pondered over as words her own mother might have spoken, but which she felt had been said then once for all, for no one ever so addressed her again.

Her education would have been neglected had it not been very clear to Mrs. Parker's mind that she had good abilities, and might turn them to account for the younger children. So the governess, herself not too pleased with this unexpected addition to the school-room, was instructed to bring her on as fast as she could, and thus unconsciously Deborah came in for the chief pleasure of her dreary life. She loved learning, and studied diligently, so that at sixteen she was made governess to the little ones, and Miss Smart was dismissed.

There were other pleasures, too, which came to her, miserable and crushed though she was; the blue sky and the stars, the birds with their joyous songs, all nature's sweet soothing sympathy she drank in eagerly. As to religion, to a nature like hers, ever looking up and seeking perfection, it came to her as something she must have, though it was scarcely of a kind which Mrs. Parker would have approved, though she little knew how much of Cousin Deborah's submissive demeanour was due to it.

But a childhood without sunshine and a youth without hope are not favourable to the development of a sweet, well-disciplined womanhood, and Deborah grew up with hard thoughts in her heart, and great discontent with her lot, for

which as yet her religion gave her no compensation.

Mr. John Gibson, a far-off cousin of her mother's, who, long years after, came to know her, always in his mind compared her to a grotesque apple-tree he remembered in his father's orchard. It had been planted and grafted with the other trees, but by some means had been hidden behind a heap of rubbish. Struggling upwards to the light and warmth, as is the way with most things, human or otherwise, it had grown into a crooked, unsightly tree, bent and twisted, and devoid of anything like beauty. He remembered how, when the old door and other impediments to its growth had been pulled aside, disclosing the deformity which was so ugly to contemplate, he had said to the gardener, "Cut it down, Miles; it will never do any good;" and that the man had replied, "Nay, nay, sir; give it a chance."

So the misshapen tree had been undisturbed, and in the course of time had worn on its brow as fair a crown of blushing blossoms as its more beautiful companions. He remembered, too, how fine its fruit was, and that the only drawback was that the branches, twisted and turned out of their original bent, in their persistent striving after the sunshine, hung over the wall,

so that the apples were far too tempting to the passers-by to be left in peace, and the rightful owners gathered none. Cousin Deborah's "chance" had come to her in this fashion.

She was five-and-twenty, longing and yet fearing for the time to come when her two remaining pupils should be old enough to go to school : longing, because then she hoped she might be allowed to take a situation as governess, and so get free from Mrs. Parker and her family ; fearing, because she knew that it was quite possible that lady might wish to retain her services, she having duly trained her orphan relative "to make herself generally useful," as the advertisements have it.

While in this doubtful state one afternoon something happened. Her youngest pupil, a boy of nine, was obstinate and provoking, and would not learn a certain declension, upon which she insisted ; the contest waxed warm, and then—true son of his mother—the little tyrant had thrown her dependent position in her teeth, declared he was not bound to obey her, though she was bound to teach him, and reproached her with wearing his sister's old clothes, and looking a guy, till Cousin Deborah, roused and stung into fury, had difficulty in controlling herself.

She was sitting by the table in a kind of

white heat of impotent rage, feeling that she could not stand much more, when Mrs. Parker opened the door.

"Deborah," she said, "a gentleman is here—a Mr. Thornton; he says he is a younger brother of your grandfather Thornton, and he wishes to see you."

The words came across the darkness of Deborah's life like a ray of sunshine. She rose instantly.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"In the drawing-room, but——" and Mrs. Parker hesitated, suddenly struck by her young cousin's dingy attire. "Come into my room, and put a ribbon in your hair, or a bow on your dress; you need brightening up."

Perhaps her pupil's taunts still rankled in her breast, or, may be, the thought of a possible protector made her brave. At any rate she astonished Mrs. Parker by saying :

"I wish my uncle to see me as I am."

"But at least a white collar and cuffs, Deborah," pleaded Mrs. Parker, totally unlike her usual self. "What will your uncle think?"

"I wish him to think the truth; and as to collar and cuffs, or a bright ribbon, I should not know how to wear them. I go as I am, or not at all."

Mrs. Parker in silence walked on to the drawing-room, and putting the best face she could upon the matter, said, in her blindest tones :

“ This is Deborah, Mr. Thornton.”

“ So this is Deborah, my great-niece Deborah ; my brother George’s grandchild. Come here, my dear, and let me look at you.”

He put his hands on her shoulders, and held her at arm’s length for a minute, scanning the face and features ; then he drew her towards him and kissed her forehead, saying fervently :

“ God bless you, my dear.”

Deborah did not speak, but a sudden rush of mingled feelings made her heart beat quickly, and she held her uncle’s hand in hers with a tight grasp, which said more than any words, and then he looked at her again.

It was a face young in some respects, but with a hunted look upon it, and the brow was lined as if the cares of life had touched it too early. It was a pleasant face so far as features went, for the grey eyes were large and full of expression, and the nose was well cut and sensitive. As to the mouth, it was quivering too much for him to bear to look at it ; he only noticed the thin lips, and said assuringly :

“ You are like your grandfather, my dear,

and he was one of the best men I ever knew."

At this Deborah looked up, and Mrs. Parker made some remark about family likeness reappearing in the second or third generation, which no one heeded.

"I have been roaming about the world the greater part of my life," said the white-haired old man, "and have lost all belonging to me—*had* lost, I should say ; for now I have found you it will be a very different kind of thing. Are you willing to come to your old uncle, Deborah—willing to keep his house and humour his old age, and be to him as a daughter ?"

"Oh yes !" said Deborah, with an earnestness which no one could mistake.

"Then, madam, are you willing to spare her ?" he asked, turning towards Mrs. Parker with an air which his niece admired, though she could not have defined it.

"We should not wish to stand in her light," said Mrs. Parker ; "but of course, after twenty years——" And here she brought out her handkerchief and pressed it to a pair of perfectly tearless eyes.

"Yes, yes ; and you must allow me to thank you for any kindness shown to her," said Mr. Thornton, though from Deborah's appearance,

he was not disposed to think much had been given her. "Your relationship to her is on the side of her father's mother, I believe?" he added.

"Yes; my dear cousin married her grandfather."

"Well, no one can dispute *my* claim, at any rate," he said, cheerfully; "but if you want proof, look here;" and he opened an oval morocco case and showed a miniature on ivory, which Deborah immediately caught and looked at intensely, then said:

"I have always been told I could not remember him, but it reminds me very much of my father, especially about the mouth."

"Yes, it is very like him," said Mrs. Parker, "and like his father too."

"It is his father." And then Mr. Thornton showed the initials and date in one corner.

That he was no impostor was plain, for he and Mrs. Parker began to talk of members of the family long since dead; and he told how, on returning to England five years ago, he had sought in vain for any trace of his brother's children, and that only by means of a gravestone in a quiet country churchyard had he discovered at last, only a few days since, that there was some one left belonging to him. Now he claimed

Deborah as his own, and after what she considered only a proper show of reluctance, Mrs. Parker gave her up, and then wondered to herself how she would get on without her.

"Then next Tuesday I will come for you, Deborah," said her great-uncle at parting; and it was only after he was gone that she found he had left in her hand a ten-pound note.

Apart from the finding a relative who would really love her, and whom she would love as she had never loved before—which knowledge was in itself sufficient to turn her whole ideas of life upside down—this possession of ten pounds seemed a pleasure too great to realise. What presents she would make to every one!—for in the sunshine of this new-found love her frozen feelings thawed quickly. It was due to her uncle that she should go to his house suitably dressed, so that a portion of her treasure was spent on making herself presentable, and it gratified some unacknowledged sentiment in her heart—probably pride, though it did not strike her so—that she should leave all her old shabby things behind her, and only take with her what was absolutely her own in the old hair trunk in which, twenty years ago, her possessions had accompanied her to Mrs. Parker's. But she was not extravagant in what she bought for herself,

and the sum that remained went in buying something for every one, from Mrs. Parker and the two married daughters down to the little boy who helped the gardener. It was such a new thing to be able to make presents, and she was so thoroughly disinterested in her pleasure, that it was a surprise to her to find the wretched little mortals in the schoolroom turning from zero to summer heat in their devotion to her, and one quite as painful and contemptible to have to trace this home to the possession of a new bat in one case and a fishing-rod in the other. "Who cares for such love?" she thought, turning away from them with a sense of disgust, and longing for Tuesday to come.

It came at last, and Mr. Thornton took her away with him, leaving in her stead with Mrs. Parker a cheque for one thousand pounds. He had offered it in a manner which could not have wounded the most delicate feelings, and as Mrs. Parker's were far from being of that order, no one could be farther from taking offence than she was. What little conscience was left to her told her she was paid twice over for anything the orphan had cost her; but who would fill her place? That was a question which was never settled, for no one else would come on such terms as Deborah had served her; so she gave

it up at last; only from henceforth Cousin Deborah was a person of importance in the estimation of the Parker family; for old Mr. Thornton was comfortably off, there was no doubt, and his great-niece would inherit all there was. So "on all accounts," said Mrs. Parker, "it would not be right to let the connection drop." And so she spent a good deal of her time and thought in endeavouring to keep it up.

From that time Cousin Deborah was a different being—not that her life in the Cottage at South Walford with her uncle was altogether without its drawbacks, or as delightful as she had planned it should be; still on the whole it was very fairly happy. No thought of a time when his money would be hers ever came to mar the perfect, unselfish love with which she devoted herself to him. That he appreciated it there was no doubt, but he was silent, and for the most part undemonstrative, so that the signs of affection he gave her were rare, and in the first years this was a source of trouble to her, whose affections, strong naturally, and pent up for so many years, found now their vent in a tide of unwearying self-sacrifice and tender care, which every one outside the Cottage walls heartily admired. Her uncle was her study.

He taught her to play chess, and was proud to find she had what he thought most women lacked—a head. She practised the old songs which he cared for, and was never weary of listening to the family chronicles which he was so glad to relate. They had a pony carriage, and drove about the neighbourhood, that she might sketch and enjoy herself, as he expressed it; and both were devoted to the garden and greenhouse. She had books *ad libitum*, and money at command for all she needed; and though others thought her life must be lonely, she did not seem to find it so. Sometimes a few words from her uncle, which showed her how he appreciated the love which was never impatient of his infirmities, would warm her heart into unusual life, and compensate for weeks of apparent coldness; and insensibly the sharp angles in her character became more rounded by contact with his.

Then, too, their neighbours were kind and friendly; and when Mr. Gibson and his wife came one summer for six weeks to the parsonage while the rector was away, it was a pleasure unlooked for and thankfully appreciated to find that he was a relative of her own through that mother whom she had never seen, but of whom Mr. Gibson could talk to her as no one else could,

for his memory of her, though childish, was vivid, and this tie bound them together.

As to love—love in the usual sense of the word—whether Deborah gave any thought to it no one else was privileged to know. People said (but then people will talk) that it was a pity to devote herself so exclusively to her uncle, who was old, and, in the natural course of things, could not live long; but no one hinted such an idea to her; it was felt she would have scouted it. Long or short, it mattered not to her; as long as he lived, she would be his entirely, and no one should come between them. It was a very sad day in her life when, going to his study one afternoon to rouse him from his sleep, she found it beyond her power, and realised, with a sense of desolation, that the angel of death had been there before her, and that the eyes fast closed would never meet hers again till she too had slept and awaked in heaven. .

Then came a time of dreariness which is given to most of us to feel, at least once in our lives, when the past and future alike mock the dull weariness of the present, and death seems more acceptable than life. Mrs. Parker turned her thoughts afresh to Cousin Deborah, and wondered what she would do with her forty thousand

pounds, and whether she might not reasonably expect her own children and grand-children to profit thereby, "considering," she said, "what I did for her in the days when I was her only friend in the world." But Deborah did not draw any nearer to her at this time; only, a year afterwards, when her cousins at Lowton had persuaded her to leave home for a few weeks, she turned over in her mind the subject of a possible debt, and asked advice of Mrs. Gibson. She liked her cousin's wife; not that the two could sympathise on all points, or even nearly all. Miss Thornton's nature had been first warped and twisted out of all proportion, and then allowed to break forth suddenly in a manner quite opposite to the steady, ordinary, yet loving and gentle course of Mrs. Gibson's life. But the eccentricities of the one had a certain charm for the other, and the calm, well-ordered, if not too intellectual mind of Mrs. Gibson offered repose to one so torn with doubts and questionings, so unnaturally developed in some points and repressed in others, that as some fresh phase of life called forth new capacities and feelings of which she had been hitherto unconscious, she would wonder which was her real side, or whether indeed she had not, like the chameleon, so many aspects as to question her

own identity, and wonder which was true and which was false. She had no notion of benefiting Mrs. Parker's family—at least, as that lady viewed it. She felt herself under no obligation, but she did certainly wish to be just, and that evening on which her ill-restrained excitement had awoke the sleeping baby, she went to her room at ten o'clock, determined on sending the cheque to-morrow; "And then I shall have done with them," she thought.

But she did not go to sleep after thinking this. It was a boisterous night, and she sat in her arm-chair by the fire with a book in her hand, listening to the wind and rain, and lost in a reverie to which the talk with Mrs. Gibson had given rise.

CHAPTER II.

DOWNSTAIRS in his study sat the Reverend John Gibson, vainly endeavouring to write his sermon for the next Sunday evening. On looking at him for the first time, the impression left on the beholder's mind would probably be that no one could by any possibility ever dream of calling him "Jack." All the fun and nonsense embodied in that one word, the free and easy style of life which mocks at conventionalities, and delights in innocently shocking people, found no expression in his face. But on looking again, it might become apparent to any one—that is, who had eyes to see—that he was not inappropriately named "John," for that "grace of the Lord" which can ennoble the most rugged features shone on his countenance and on the high smooth forehead to a degree which is rare, but still far from impossible to find, and which was a passport in his favour wherever he

went, for no one dreamed of doubting either his sincerity or good will. But the best of men are only mortal, and at this moment the vicar of Lowton, a man looked up to and trusted as few are privileged to be, was blindly staring at the paper before him, wondering what he should write, and whether, after all, it would not be better to leave off writing, and brave all Miss Bridget Farrar's satirical remarks, by taking an old sermon to preach on Sunday evening. No faint hope that she would not recognise it came to his help, for he knew her terrible memory; and after all, setting Miss Bridget aside, he was not quite sure that he liked his old sermons. Something in him, either mind, or heart, or soul, had grown since those early discourses of his had come fresh from his brain, and although dear to him for some reasons, they did not satisfy him now. There was life in them certainly, but scarcely body—or soul; which was it? He sat pondering this question, all the while with a distinct vision before him of little Miss Bridget, the late vicar's daughter, in her ancient bonnet and silk shawl, with her bag of Sunday-school books on her arm, saying in her sprightly tones, "Now, my dear Mr. Gibson, it is all very well, you know, but you are no longer a boy, and that sermon last night was boyish, *very* boyish,"

(with a frown), "and we are not children; we want something substantial, something real, not merely a boy's fancies, for after all, what are they?—ephemeral, like the rest of youthful things;" and so forth in the same strain, till Mr. Gibson's head was more bewildered than ever.

It was not, perhaps, to be wondered at that he could not settle quietly to his writing to-night; he had but a few hours since returned home from his father's funeral, and his thoughts kept travelling back to his old home, and the blank there, so that it seemed impossible to bring them into order. Outside, the wind and driving rain were making a great commotion, and every fresh gust swept the branches of the lilac-bush with a great storm of raindrops against the window; and within, the fire crackled and snapped in a way quite sufficient to disturb a rather nervous man who had travelled two hundred miles since breakfast, and was moreover pre-occupied with sorrowful, though far from hopeless memories. Suddenly a fresh sound startled him—crunching, heavy steps on the gravelled walk, followed by a tap of the knuckles at the front door. Mr. Gibson left his sermon to its fate, went into the passage, turned up the lamp, which Cousin Deborah on going

upstairs had turned very low down, and still keeping the chain up, opened the door.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"It's me, sir," answered a voice he knew.

Mr. Gibson opened the door wide, and admitted a tall, rough-looking man, with a sack over his shoulders, from which the water dripped fast.

"What's the matter, Sutton?"

"It's Joe Bryant, sir, as I've come about. He's terrible bad, and doctor said this morning, as how it 'ud go hard with him, and he questioned if he'd last the night through, and he's been a askin' for you, sir, so I made so bold as to come."

"Quite right, I'll be ready directly; go to the fire for a minute or two."

But Sutton "calkelated he'd best stay where he was," and the clergyman went upstairs. As he reached the landing, a slight figure in deep mourning met him, and asked what was wrong.

"It is one of the miners come for me to go to see a poor fellow who is ill. Just tell Ellen if she is awake, will you? she may wonder what is the matter; but don't sit up, Deborah, I will take the key."

Miss Thornton came downstairs, saw that her

cousin was well shielded from cold and damp, with leggings, macintosh, and waterproof cap; then quietly shutting the door after him and the miner, made up the fire, and then went to see if Mrs. Gibson was awake. Find her sleeping she returned to the study and lay down on the sofa, prepared to open the door for her cousin and attend to him when he came back. He, meanwhile, with his companion, was plodding through the damp, sludgy field paths, the nearest way to the iron mines which had been first worked during the last spring. A band of rough men with their wives and families had come, and were living in tumble-down sheds and huts near the mines; and for these poor stragglers Mr. Gibson had (till winter stopped him) held a service in the open air every Sunday. The church was some distance off, and had it been nearer they might not have cared to attend; but to these open-air services under the summer sky, with the old hills for walls, and the Sabbath stillness around, most of the miners and their families had regularly come, listening respectfully to simple Bible truths, standing with uncovered heads while the words of prayer fell from the clergyman's lips with a solemn, quieting power, strangely new to those wandering uncared-for lives, and rough honest voices

joined in the hymns which rose up from the furze bushes by the hill-side.

Mr. Gibson had taken much interest in this part of his people, and now alternate hope and fear held possession of his mind while he exchanged (as well as the driving wind would let him) questions and answers with his guide.

"Has he been long ill?"

"Well, sir, he was never so hardy as the rest of us, and he's took cold upon cold till it's settled on his chest; and more'n a week ago he took to his bed, and doctor spoke as if he was 'most done up."

"Is he sensible?"

"That's as it happens, sir. Times he speaks nat'ral like, but he's mostly a-callin' for his mother, or Thyrza (that's his wife as died just afore he come here), or baby, and now and then for parson; but we knowed you was out, so it wasn't no good to come, and I wasn't sure as how you'd be in to-night, but I thought I'd see. Me and Bryant has been mates for a good bit now."

"I am very glad you did come, Sutton. Who has the child?"

"My wife, sir, has took her in with ours. She's but a baby still, and don't know what she's a losin' of."

"How old is she?"

"Eighteen months, sir: she can just run."

Wind and rain prevented more talk, and soon the shed was reached. Sutton opened the door, and revealed a low, dingy-looking room; a fire in a stove was at one end, and by it sat several men smoking. Except one, all rose as the clergyman entered. He bade them "Good evening," and then went up to the bed where lay poor Joe Bryant, restlessly turning and tossing from side to side. Mr. Gibson sat down and laid his hand on that of the miner, saying kindly:

"How are you now, my poor fellow?"

There was no gleam of recognition, and the poor head turned restlessly, while broken murmurs of "Thyrza" and "parson" were all that the clergyman could make out.

"Parson's here," said the man who had fetched him. But the words did not quiet the sufferer, he still moaned and muttered unconnectedly; but presently Mr. Gibson, listening intently, made out the words "a great way off, a great way off."

Instantly he repeated, in a quiet, solemn voice, which in its clearness reached the rough group by the stove:

"When he was yet a great way off, his father

saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

The words of the beautiful parable seemed to act as the voice of the Divine Master on the winds and the waves, for the restless movement of the head ceased, and the dying man listened eagerly.

Once more the clergyman said the gracious words, and then he knelt down and prayed for the sufferer who, by reason of his sinfulness, felt himself a great way off, that the loving Father, full of compassion and ever ready to forgive, would meet him and welcome him home. A solemn silence followed the prayer. Quietness and peace came to the troubled face, and the man lay still as if he had been soothed to rest; and presently, quite calmly, he died.

Mr. Gibson turned away and prepared to go. His heart was very full. Joy and hope had conquered the anxiety which had striven for the mastery in his walk here, and filled his soul with thankfulness that he had been in time to dispel with the light of God's word the gloom of the dark valley; while a wonderful sense of that joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, was overpowering. He had said "Good night," and was refusing Sutton's offer of escort home, when a voice came

from a man by the stove—the man who had not risen on his entrance,—entreating him to stay awhile.

“Won’t ye say a bit of a prayer with us, parson ? it seemed to help him off easy, and I reckon we need it as much.”

Such a request was one which the clergyman would never refuse, least of all coming as it did from one who had given but faint indication of caring for what he had spoken about so often. He knelt down ; one or two followed his example, others stood ; and, in tones full of emotion and earnestness, asked for himself and for them all that blessing of nearness to God to which the first step is the consciousness of being “a great way off ;” and that though they might as yet be tied and bound by the chain of their sins, He would, through the pitifulness of His great mercy, loose them, and enable them henceforth to walk in newness of life. The circumstances under which they were uttered gave an added solemnity of meaning to the words as they rose in that chamber of death ; and afterwards the men crowded round, and one by one, hard rough hands were grasped in his as he again said “Good night.” The man who had asked him to pray insisted on accompanying him home ; and though but few words passed on the way,

the miner would not have been without the sense of brotherliness which a second grasp of the hand gave him as the vicarage door was reached and Mr. Gibson went in. Cousin Deborah was ready for him with refreshment, which he said he did not need, but which she made him take; and over it he told her of what had passed; and she thought much about it afterwards through a wakeful night.

The next day was only less stormy than the night had been, but Miss Thornton was not a person likely to be hindered (when she had made up her mind) by such trivial causes as wind and rain. Well wrapped up, and under a large umbrella, she trudged along the high road the four and a half miles which led to the mines. On inquiring for the cottage where Sutton lived she was directed to it, but when she arrived there a sudden shyness overcame her, and it required an effort of will to make herself knock at the rough door.

The interior was wretched. Dirt and discomfort prevailed to an extent to which even she was unaccustomed, and she had had ten years' experience of the poor at South Walford. Children with tangled hair, and half clothed, were crowded round a small fire, and on the lap of a girl, evidently the eldest of the group, lay a

little ragged, dark-haired child, with wide open eyes and a very dirty face.

"Is this the little girl whose father died last night?" asked Miss Thornton, in so kind a voice that the child, who was evidently presiding as head nurse, lost the frightened look which the lady's entrance had called up on her face, and answered :

"Yes, 'm, an' a wearisome bairn she is an' all ; never quiet except when I've got her, an' I can't be holdin' of her always when there's our baby to see to as well."

"Where is it?"

Upon which the whole mass of younger ones went into a dark corner and pulled out a wooden cradle, wherein lay a much younger child than Thyrza Bryant, whom their noise very speedily awoke ; of course he began to cry, and the little orphan joined in, and the elder girl gave two or three very hearty slaps to the offenders, which had the effect of making them cry too ; and then she slapped them again, to give them something to cry for, she said ; so that there was a dreadful din, and Miss Thornton was fain to wish she had never come. However, she stayed till peace was restored, to further which end she had distributed all the pennies and half-pennies among them of which she had

found herself possessed, and then she asked the girl when her mother was likely to be at home. This seemed so very doubtful that she thought it better not to wait, and saying she would call again, she went home. She paid two more visits to the cottage, and on the last found Mrs. Sutton there ; afterwards she lay awake the whole night, and was unusually pre-occupied the next day, which was the day of the miner's funeral. The following morning, after breakfast, she called to Mr. Gibson, who had just gone to his study :

“ John, I want to speak to you.”

“ I am at your service, Deborah.—Come, little people, don't tease.”

“ Oh, they are not teasing,” said Cousin Deborah. “ I like it, if only they will not smother me quite.”

For one was on her back, another hung round her neck, looking up into her face ; Nelly was pulling at her skirts, and Alice from her high perch made reins of the plaits of Cousin Deborah's hair, and was pulling away to her own great satisfaction.

“ Now, monkeys, off with you,” said Miss Thornton, when she had managed to stumble to a seat in the hall ; “ run up to mamma and tell her I am coming in half an hour.”

The hold of the strong little arms relaxed, and as she watched the sturdy legs scramble upstairs, there was a smile on Cousin Deborah's face which made her look something altogether sweet and good, quite beautiful to gaze upon, spite of her tumbled hair and crimson cheeks. She was rather tired and out of breath with the boisterous play, so she sat down in the easy chair by the study table, while, man-like, Mr. Gibson stood with his back to the fire, and waited for her to speak.

This did not seem quite easy, for she sat still long after the effects of her romp had gone, so that the clergyman began with "What is it you wish to say, Deborah?"

"I want to adopt the child of that poor miner, and bring her up as my own."

Mr. Gibson was thunderstruck. He had not noticed the manifestation on his cousin's part of any special interest in the little orphan, and he was quite in ignorance of the visits Miss Thornton had paid to Sutton's hut. No wonder the announcement took his breath away.

"But I do not understand," he said at last.

"Then I wonder at you, John, for being so dense. I want to adopt that poor little Thyrza Bryant. Now do you see?"

"Yes ; but excuse me, Deborah, I am afraid you do not."

"Not what ?"

"Sée."

Miss Thornton folded her hands and leaned back in the chair, with a look of resignation on her face. "I wish you would explain yourself," she said.

"In the first place you have never even seen the child."

"I have been to see her three times within the last five days."

"But, Deborah, such an extraordinary thing ! do you really mean it ? You know I can never see a joke."

"I never in my life was in more sober earnest. The child is an orphan, a little friendless girl, dependent on the charity of people so poor that they have more than enough to do to provide for themselves. I have plenty. I know the miseries of orphanhood, why should I not save her from them ?"

The smile was gone, but it was a very eager, earnest face which looked up into Mr. Gibson's.

"I understand," he said, warmly ; "and it is like you, Deborah, to propose such a thing ; only it is a great undertaking. Of course, if you adopt her you do so entirely ?"

"Certainly ; I should bring her up as a lady, educate her, and provide for her altogether. I would make her so happy !"

"It seems cruel to throw cold water on such a scheme ; but still one ought to consider."

"I have considered."

"No doubt ; but may I make a suggestion or two ?"

"As many as you like."

But even as she said the words it was plain from her manner that, whatever he might suggest, she would keep to her purpose. Mr. Gibson did not hope much, but still he would do what he thought right.

"Has she no relations ?"

"None, Mrs. Sutton tells me."

"Would it not be doing her a truer kindness to provide for her in her own station of life ? If she were educated more carefully than the generality of her class, might she not be of greater service to them than if removed altogether ?"

"I don't think so."

"It seems to me an experiment involving some risk. Field-flowers never grow well in a hot-house."

"And you think her low origin will be a

hindrance to my bringing her up refined and nice. Is that what you mean?"

There came into Mr. Gibson's mind a proverb, a very homely one, and having reference to the manufacture of a silk purse out of impossible materials, but he would not allude to it; he simply repeated, "It is an experiment involving a great risk."

"I have thought it well over. I know the miners are a lawless set, and that people might think if I wished to adopt a child I might take one from my own rank of life; but where should I find greater need for love and care than in this poor little girl—an orphan without friends?"

"True, quite true."

"I wanted to ask you if you would object to be her guardian,—I mean in case I should die. I shall provide for her, as I told you, but it would be a comfort to know she had you for a friend if I died. You would not object to that?"

"Certainly not; at least, so far as I alone am concerned: perhaps Ellen might not care for the children to be together."

Miss Thornton looked pained. "That is what I must expect," she said, "and of course I have no right to thrust her upon others, though, properly educated, I don't see why there need

be any fear. I shall give the poor little thing plenty of love, and that always develops good."

She was so confident in the wisdom of her own plan, that it seemed cruel to oppose her. Besides, such an unusual act of charity ought to meet with a little sympathy, and Mr. Gibson, who was always so ready to help any effort for the good of the needy, reproached himself with being cold. "I will do my best," he said; "she shall never want a friend so long as I live."

"Thank you, John. And there is one thing I should like to make sure. I do not wish her obscure origin to be brought up against her, or to hinder her in any way. People are very prejudiced, and often cruel. I do not wish any one but you and Ellen to know whose child she is, or what her parents' station was. I may trust you to keep it secret, I know."

"Yes, you may trust me. But if at any time when she is old enough to understand, I feel it right to tell *her*, may I do so?"

"Yes, if you see any urgent need."

"Thank you."

"Shall you very much mind if I ask you to tell Ellen about it?"

"Not at all."

"Then I will go up to her now for an hour,

and afterwards I will take Nelly and George for a walk. You will tell her before lunch?"

"Yes." Then, as she rose to go, he held out his hand to her, and said warmly, "God bless you, Deborah."

Both words and action reassured her, and she said, half timidly, "Then you do not think me utterly blind and foolish?"

Instead of quoting the proverb which had thrust itself into his mind with a persistence with which an elevating or consoling memory seldom comes or stays, he said in a low, reverent tone, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me;" and then Deborah felt truly he had bidden her God speed.

Nevertheless she longed to know what Ellen would think of her plan, and she wished to speak of it before meeting her at lunch; so as soon as the walk was over she went to the dressing-room. To her great surprise Mrs. Gibson gave her a kiss without saying a word.

"Has John told you?"

"Yes; and I hope with all my heart your kindness will be rewarded."

"I never thought of that."

"Of course not; it would not be like you to do so."

"I am not sure that it is all kindness; I

think there is some selfishness in the matter. I long to have some one to love."

Mrs. Gibson thought of her own delicately-reared darlings, and though she would not have spared one of them upon any consideration, she could not help wondering that Cousin Deborah should have chosen for the child of her adoption one whose origin could scarcely be much lower than it was; but she would not have said so on any account.

"What is her name?—the little girl's, I mean."

"Thyrza; but Mrs. Sutton tells me she has never been christened."

"Then why not let her be christened at the same time as baby? John and I can be sponsors if you will allow us, Deborah."

It was an offer prompted by a genuine impulse of kindness, and Miss Thornton was greatly touched by it. No other proof of Mrs. Gibson's sympathy could have affected her as much as this, and she thanked her heartily. Lunch interrupted further talk; but in the evening, when the two ladies were alone, Mrs. Gibson asked her cousin if she should find a nurse-maid for her.

"I do not mean to have one," said Miss Thornton.

"But how will you manage?"

"Very well indeed. The fact is, Ellen, I want poor little Thyrza to have no service done for her but that of love. I know there are very nice nurses, I don't for one moment dispute the fact; but I want to do everything for her myself,—everything, so that it may be all free love on my side; and it will be such a bond between us."

Mrs. Gibson did not see the subject quite in the same light. She was of opinion that it was good for children to be sometimes away from those who loved them best, but she forbore to say so, for, after all, if her cousin were making a mistake it was only on the side of over-kindness; so she introduced the topic of garments for the little one, and Miss Thornton was open to advice on this point, so that the two talked on without fear of clashing till the conversation gradually drifted into another channel.

It caused some little commotion among the village people (to say nothing of the band of miners) when it was known that the clergyman's cousin was going to adopt poor Joe Bryant's little girl. "I wish her joy of her bargain!" said Mrs. Sutton in talking it over with her husband, "for of all the contrary bairns I've seen, this one beats 'em. Poor lady! she'll

have her hands full, little wilful thing! Well, let's be thankful she's found a home, for I'd ha' been sorry to keep her, and the 'house' isn't good for such as her, and there was nothing between, as I could see; so let's be thankful."

With the exception of an old Prayer-book, in which were recorded the dates of her parents' marriage and of her own birth, there was nothing for the little orphan but her father's clothes, which Mr. Gibson thought might rightly be given to Sutton. Miss Thornton herself gave his wife a liberal present, with many kind words, for her care of the child during the fortnight succeeding her father's death, and then, on the day before the christening, she was asked to bring Thyrza to the vicarage. On the next morning there was, as was only to be expected, a larger congregation than was usual on such an occasion assembled to witness the baptism of the clergyman's daughter and the miner's child. The little unconscious baby, in her long white robes, lay peacefully in her nurse's arms; not so Cousin Deborah's goddaughter, who (though not till after a storm of passion), had been dressed beautifully in a soft white pelisse and hood by the loving hands thus performing for her their first service. Miss Thornton carried her, for she

was to be her godmother, and she wished to institute her possession of her at once. During the first part of the baptismal service, while the sleeping baby lay all unconscious of the solemn words which were being said over her and for her, Thyrza scowled from beneath the shade of her thick black eyebrows, and looked anything but lovable. She shook her head vigorously as the drops of water fell on her face ; but when the cross was signed she put up both little clenched fists and resolutely rubbed away the sacred symbol, till nothing remained on her forehead but a broad red mark. Cousin Deborah was not superstitious, but Mrs. Gibson was—not in any great degree, but still a little ; and when, after the service, the nurse said to her, “ Let’s hope, ma’am, that it is not a forecast of what she’ll be,” her mistress had a few fears that the easy yoke and light burden would be shaken off by the wilful child as determinedly as its sign had been thus early rejected. But when she said something of the kind to her husband, he gravely reprovèd her for encouraging such a notion, and she tried to put it aside.

Two days afterwards Miss Thornton left with the little girl, and Mrs. Gibson went to the door to meet her husband, who had accompanied them to the station.

"Well, how did they go off?"

"Pretty well. Deborah wished to have Thyrza on her lap, but that was decidedly objected to. The love is evidently all on one side at present. I never saw such a frown on the face of so young a child."

"Nurse is full of dark forebodings; but it is very early yet to judge."

"So it is; but—well, to tell the truth, Ellen, I am not very sanguine; the child has no bump of veneration—it is a great want."

"You dear old phrenologist! remember how young she is. Besides, all the organs need time and care to develop them; and as to veneration—well, you must allow she is in good hands. Deborah has a most reverent mind; she will be sure to draw out all that is good in her. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see; but still——" and Mr. Gibson stopped suddenly.

"It is not like you to look at the dark side of things, John; you know your theory, that in every one there are hidden capabilities for all possible good, which only need drawing out. There! I have said that as wisely as you could yourself."

"You wish to beat me with my own weapons. Well, I own myself vanquished; but still I have

my doubts of Deborah. She will spoil that child, you may depend upon it."

"Oh, surely not! She has a tolerable will of her own, and, full of play as she is with them, I am sure the children would never think of disobeying her."

"Perhaps not. Yes, she has a strong will, but then she has so many other points, and she is so anxious to spare the child pain and mortification: I rather question the existence of wise judgment in Deborah. She always seems to me the gravest specimen of a fine character spoilt that I ever met with."

"Not spoilt, John; that signifies past remedy, and she may be different yet; though, for my part, I don't wish to see her much altered."

"Well, then, I will not say spoilt altogether, but twisted, turned, distorted. You know the old apple tree in the orchard at home?"

"In the angle by the south wall?"

"Yes. Well, that is a perfect representation of Deborah, to my mind."

"Perhaps so. Only, do you know, John, I rather admire those little eccentricities of hers. The way she folds her tiny hands and leans back when she has stated her opinions and knows they will be opposed, is quite bewitching; the

mystery to me is that no one ever fell in love with her."

Mr. Gibson turned the idea over in his mind. At last he shook his head. "She is not exactly a restful person," he said at last, as if that were all he needed in a wife.

Mrs. Gibson laughed, and for that time the subject was dropped.

The adoption of Thyrza by Miss Thornton caused great dismay in the mind of Mrs. Parker. She knew nothing whatever of the child's antecedents, or her wrath would have been hotter still. "Such ingratitude!" she exclaimed, "such base ingratitude! when for twenty years I clothed and educated her, and brought her up with my own children; and now what ought rightly to be theirs will all go to this child she has taken;" for Mrs. Parker was far from feeling that her cousin had repaid her even with fifteen hundred pounds.

As to Miss Thornton, she from henceforth devoted herself entirely to the little orphan. She had her little cot by her own bedside, and lavished all kinds of fondness upon the child; she dressed her daintily, and wove into each stitch of the frocks she made for her any amount of love; she mapped out for herself and Thyrza a future that was full of brightness, for

she never doubted the power of her loving devotion to call forth all that was good in the nature she so earnestly longed to train aright.

"Miss Thornton looks as young again," said the rector of South Walford to his wife some weeks after Thyrza's arrival at the Cottage. "Well, that little maiden's lot has fallen in pleasant places, and I hope she may prove worthy of all that is done for her."

"I very much doubt it," said his wife.

As to the Gibsons, they were obliged to content themselves with Miss Thornton's letters, wherein all that was bright she eagerly detailed; but that visit to Lowton was not repeated for a long, long time, so that they only knew from what she said how Thyrza grew and thrived. But they felt a very loving interest in her and her charge—an interest certainly not manifested (at least in the same way) by those other relations, the Parkers. They spoke contemptuously and bitterly about it whenever they chose to mention so disagreeable a subject, and in course of time the adoption of Thyrza almost ceased to be alluded to, except when, in a moment of angry disappointment, they would speak of it in a tone of ineffable scorn as "*Cousin Deborah's Whim.*"

CHAPTER III.

AND how did it answer ?

Sad to say, it seemed likely to bring Cousin Deborah less joy than sorrow. High-minded she was undoubtedly, and most affectionate and devoted, but, as Mr. Gibson had said, she wanted judgment. In her dreary childhood she had longed for affection more than for anything else, and had drooped in its absence ; and her great desire to make glad an orphan's heart had its origin in the knowledge of that sadness of orphanhood which in her young days no one had tried to soothe. But she made a mistake,—perhaps, under the circumstances, a natural mistake, but still a very grave one. She had thought the Parker children all wicked and unlovable alike ; and though she knew the young people at South Walford rectory and also at Lowton had faults, she had never found them of a serious kind ; and as she had no more extended

acquaintance with children individually, she had classed them as good and bad without much discrimination, allowing the little Sutcliffes and Gibsons to come under the former head, and her old enemies and tyrants under the latter. She did not understand, as might have been the case with more experience, how widely diverse are the dispositions and temperaments of every member of earth's great family. She had needed kindness, and longed for it herself, therefore she poured it out lavishly on the little orphan she had taken to her heart, never doubting that her method was right. She was far too humble to see that her own was a fine, sensitive nature, with warm, noble, generous impulses, and capabilities of self-devotion which kindness and love were not likely to spoil; and that Thyrza was of a very different mould, proud and arrogant and cold, taking every good thing that came to her as her right, and showing universal indifference to what happened to any one else so long as she was out of harm, and seeming quite independent of the need of love from others, or of devotion to them, which in Cousin Deborah was such a necessity.

How much her indulgence had had to do in fostering all these tendencies Miss Thornton would ponder, as day after day increasingly con-

vinced her of what was plain enough to others, that Thyrza at twelve years of age was a most disagreeable child.

And so she certainly was. There are stages in our growth which are in themselves unpleasing, and many a child growing into girlhood, with a world full of wonderful mysteries and hopes and happiness before her, makes herself disagreeable to others by eagerness and extravagance of thought and feeling, occasional pertness, and a contempt for the straitness of things in the world, which she feels she could soon set to rights for herself on a smoother and happier plan ; and often, the more soul and mind a child possesses, the more can she worry those about her. Not that those who have the power of sympathising find such young, ardent spirits disagreeable. For, side by side with undue eagerness, perhaps even a part of it, is the longing to live out nobly the life to which the young soul is just waking up ; and, hand in hand with extravagance of feeling, is that high-souled generosity of self-sacrifice which is only waiting for time and opportunity to develop itself into a practical carrying out of the Christian motto, " Faithful unto death ;" while the pertness and forwardness are but evidences of a young, fresh mind, eager to learn and know what, day by

day, life will gradually unfold. Let but the eagerness and sentiment and spirit of inquiry be rightly directed, and a noble womanhood will be the result. Affectionate sympathy will soon prove that the highest minds are always the most reverent and most easily led. For such young restless spirits patience and time will do much, but Thyrza was not disagreeable in this way, or to any particular class of persons. Cousin Deborah's friends, one and all, disliked her extremely ; her companions of her own age hated her, and made no secret of it. The servants had difficulty in being civil when she rated and stormed at them, and even Miss Thornton, with all her unselfish devotion, could not shut her eyes to the fact that she had been too indulgent to the child. Thyrza had no idea of the circumstances of her adoption, and therefore gratitude such as the case deserved could not be expected, neither did Cousin Deborah desire it ; but she owned to herself a longing for a little more appreciation of her love, and a little more consideration than she met with.

It was Thyrza's twelfth birthday, and Miss Thornton greeted her at breakfast with a loving embrace, and the words, " Many happy returns of the day, my darling."

Every loving appellation which her own dreary

childhood had vainly hungered for she poured out upon Thyrza. She had taught her to call her "auntie," a sound so much softer to her ears than the "Cousin Deborah" she was weary of, but the diminutive Thyrza had for some time rejected. It was "aunt," stiff and short, or "Aunt Deborah" when a shade or two less antagonistic than usual. This morning she shook herself free from the arms which were round her waist (for Miss Thornton was very small, and she towered above her), and said pettishly :

"There, that will do ! What did you give me a book for ? I should have liked a writing-case like Louisa Sutcliffe's for my present instead of a book ; but I never do have what I like, so I shall give up expecting it."

The book in question was a beautiful edition of Tennyson, with illustrations of a kind which, at an earlier age than Thyrza's, Miss Thornton would have been enraptured with. It was an ungracious and ungrateful return for her loving thought, and Cousin Deborah winced as if she had been stung.

"I did not know you wished for a writing-case, my dear, or I would have given you one."

"You might have known if you had thought ; you know how pleased I was with Louisa's."

"I am very sorry you are disappointed, Thyrza."

"Oh, well, don't bother! The Gibsons' presents are much as usual, two book-marks, of course; I wish Emily would think of something else."

Emily was the child who had been christened with Thyrza, and therefore looked on her with something of a sisterly affection, though they had never met; for Miss Thornton wished at first to wait till the talk about Thyrza's adoption had died away among the village people, and since then she had been so far from satisfied with the child that she had not cared to take her, fondly hoping that as she grew older it would be possible for her to mix with the Low-ton children without shocking their parents. But this time had never come, nor, from the aspect of affairs this morning, did it seem at all near at hand.

"It looks as if it would be a fine day for our picnic," said Cousin Deborah presently, "and that is a great thing."

Thyrza said nothing, and breakfast was finished in silence.

Miss Thornton was growing accustomed to these sulky moods of Thyrza's; it was no unusual thing for a meal to be gone through

without a word except what was necessary in the way of common civilities. She would often have taken up a book, but she knew it would be a bad example to set, so she endured the miserable silence, and took no means to make it less painful than it was.

At ten o'clock a party of young people assembled on the lawn in front of the Cottage; they came from the rectory and from another house in South Walford. It was holiday-time, so that there were little visitors at both houses, and Thyrsa brightened up considerably, and showed such unfeigned pleasure at all the little birthday offerings presented to her (some of them of no value in themselves), that a less sweet disposition than Miss Thornton's would have felt much aggrieved at seeing such a different manifestation from that which had greeted her own. But she was so sincerely anxious for the girl's good, so desirous to work upon her by love, that she had grown into the habit of looking at events, not as affecting herself, but in the light of their probable effects upon Thyrsa, and she blamed herself for not having been sufficiently observant to notice what the child had set her heart upon. Mr. and Mrs. Sutcliffe were of the party, and Captain and Mrs. Forbes, the elder brother and the mother of the other group of girls

and boys. They all set off in a state of high glee, for the day was glorious, and a picnic is a great and unfailing source of pleasure to school-boys and girls. Thyrza went with a detachment of the rectory tribe in their waggonette, Captain Forbes drove five in his dog-cart, Mrs. Sutcliffe took five or six with her in Mrs. Forbes' carriage, and that lady, who was not strong, and felt overpowered by the confused noise of so many eager tongues, was glad to be driven by Miss Thornton in her little pony-carriage along the lanes and shady roads leading to the old ruined priory which was to be the scene of the picnic. The sun had not yet broken through the silvery mist which hung over all things and told of a warm day in store for them, and on the hedges, thick and dark with their August foliage, the dewdrops hung among the yet green blackberries and the few remaining blossoms of the wild rose which could be seen among the trailing branches. The graceful festoons of the bryony with its spiral tendrils looked fresh and cool with the soft dewiness upon it, and the corn-fields around were wearing their first tint of pale yellow, to be deepened by and by into the dark gold, ready for the reapers. Larks were singing in the still air, and to Miss Thornton, after her early morning's disappoint-

ment, the quietness and peace were very soothing. Mrs. Forbes was a congenial companion, and by the time the old priory was reached she had so far forgotten her trouble as to be able to enter with a mind fairly at rest into the arrangements for the day.

Every grown-up, or rather, responsible person knows what a deal of worry and thought a picnic entails. The young ones roam about and play, and imagine the world made only for their pleasure; but to those who have the ordering of affairs the aspect is of a slightly different kind. However, on this occasion Captain Forbes was a great help: he chose a good piece of ground for croquet, and left a party of six very happily engaged with balls and mallets, while he took three or four of the girls on an exploring expedition over the ruins; while a few, who had no antiquarian tastes, went with the elder ladies to the moor close by, to fill their baskets with heath and the large blue blossoms of the wild gentian, then in its perfect beauty. Thyrza was one of the croquet players; in all games of skill she was very clever, and sure to come off conqueror, so she never lost an opportunity of this kind when one presented itself; and Cousin Deborah, always solicitous for her happiness, felt she might leave her for a while with a mind

at rest, as the face which had been so cloudy at the breakfast-table was now radiant with smiles.

The day passed pleasantly enough ; Thyrza's side won all the games, so that she was in very good spirits ; some sketches had been made by the more aspiring of the girls, and the dinner was a complete success. After tea, Captain Forbes proposed to row some of them to an island, three or four miles down the narrow river which wound along in the opposite direction to the moor, and Miss Thornton was rather astonished to find that Thyrza did not care to go ; it struck her it would have been so exactly to her taste. However, there was no accounting for her moods, and Miss Thornton made no remark. Not once in all that day since breakfast had Thyrza spoken to her, or shown any desire to be near her. It caused a sharp renewal of that pain which was always gnawing at her heart, but to which, as she told herself, surely she ought now to be accustomed. She watched the boat as it glided gently down the stream, and then went to the group of boys and girls who were amusing themselves after their own fashion.

"Where is Thyrza?" she asked, not perceiving her with the rest.

"She and Kate Sutcliffe said they were going

into the wood for ferns," said Mary Forbes, who was busy forming a quadrille, having brought her brother's violin with her, on which she asserted she could play "The Lancers" at least, if she could not accomplish anything else.

This was great fun, and Cousin Deborah troubled herself for a while no more about Thyrza, satisfied that she was innocently employed; and so she gave herself up to the contemplation of the dancers, and only called out now and then good-naturedly as Captain Forbes' violin gave out sundry unmelodious squeaks under Mary's fingers.

Kate Sutcliffe was the rector's niece; she had only known Thyrza a few days, and was inclined to think her cousins had misrepresented her, for she found her very agreeable. She was kind-hearted, and inclined to take the part of any one who was, as she thought, misjudged; so when Thyrza had asked her to go with her to look for ferns, she had instantly complied, although her heart was with the dancers. The two wandered some little way into the wood before the ditch was reached where the ferns grew, and then they spent some time in digging them up. Afterwards Kate thought it would be better to return, as it was growing dusk; but this Thyrza would not

allow, declaring that it was only the thick trees which shut out the light, and that there was plenty of time before them.

"I wish I had brought my watch," said Kate, rather nervously, for she did not like the prospect of being overtaken by the darkness, or of giving anxiety to the rest.

"Do you mean to say you have a watch, a little thing like you?" asked Thyrza in some astonishment.

"Yes, papa gave it me last year when I was thirteen; it is such a little beauty!"

"I think Aunt Deborah might have given me a watch instead of that stupid old 'Tennyson,'" said Thyrza, equally irreverent towards Miss Thornton and the poet.

"Did she give you 'Tennyson' for your birthday present?"

"Yes; just the very thing I did not want. I hate poetry; but she never thinks of such things."

"What edition is it?" asked Kate, with great interest.

Thyrza told her.

"You are an ungrateful girl," said Kate, laughingly; "I should have gone out of my wits with such a present. I love poetry dearly."

"I pity your taste, then. If you had heard Aunt Deborah quote it from morning till night, as I have all my life, you would be sick to death of it by this time ; I know I am."

The tone shocked Kate, who, school-girl though she was, was far from being irreverent or self-conceited. "Don't talk like that," she said, "it hurts me."

"Well, you *are* a little goose ! One would think you were very fond of Aunt Deborah, instead of having only seen her for the first time the day before yesterday."

"I am quite sure I should soon grow fond of her," said Kate, warmly. "The very first thing she did for me was an act of kindness. I had got my crochet cotton all tangled, and she took it out of my hands and made it right for me, and was so kind all the while. She quite won my heart."

"It is very easily won, then," said Thyrza ; "you don't know what it is to live with her."

"Do you mean to say you are not happy ?" asked Kate, in some surprise.

"Happy ? no, that I certainly am not. I want to go to school, but she won't let me ; and I can tell you I hate my hum-drum life at home."

"But she is your guardian, isn't she ?"

"Yes ; guardian or something of the sort. She has had the charge of me since I was a baby ; and you have no idea how mean she is, Kate ; she never even let me have a nurse-maid. Fancy stinginess like that !"

"I should never have thought her stingy," said Kate, musingly ; "perhaps she had some other reason."

"What other could she have ?" said Thyrza, in an irritated tone. "She is dreadfully stingy, I can tell you, or why doesn't she send me to school ?"

"Perhaps she likes to have you at home ; she might be very lonely without you," suggested Kate.

"Well, yes, there is something in that ; of course I am everything to her," said Thyrza, slightly mollified at the thought of her own importance.

"Has Miss Thornton had a very sad life ?" asked Kate. "Something in her face struck me as if she had gone through a good deal."

"I'm sure I don't know ; I never troubled myself about it. No, I should not say she has ever had much to trouble her ; she lived with an uncle ever so long, and then he left her the house and all his money—and now she has me. I should say she has had a very easy life."

Kate was not satisfied, but she said nothing, and Thyrsa began again :

" You know it is horribly dull at the Cottage."

" Is it ?"

" Wretched. Aunt Deborah potters about the garden, and expects me to take the same interest in it that she does ; and then lessons are so wearisome ; she will insist upon giving the reason for everything, and I so hate that. One thing, it all goes in at one ear and out at the other, for I never try to attend."

" Oh, but you should," said Kate, rather horrified.

" I don't, anyhow. Why should I ? It's quite bad enough to have to learn with her, without going into everything like that ; and music is detestable with her ; she makes me count, and what's the good of that when one has a correct ear ?"

" I know I have to count with Mr. Fenton, and be very particular about it too," said Kate.

" Then you learn with a master ?" said Thyrsa, in a tone as if this were another grievance. " I wish I did."

" All in good time ; masters are dreadfully particular, I can tell you. But, Thyrsa, really I think we ought to turn back ; the road is getting quite gloomy."

"You are not frightened, I hope," said Thyrza, scornfully. "I don't like cowards."

"I am not afraid of the dark, if that is what you mean, but I think we may lose our way, and that would be awkward; besides, what a fright Aunt Lucy would be in, and your aunt, too!"

"Oh, never mind that," said Thyrza, who had purposely led Kate further on, so as to delay their return. "It will make Aunt Deborah anxious," she thought. "And quite right too; perhaps she will value me a little more if she thinks I am in danger." And all this was because Miss Thornton had happened to make a mistake in the choice of a birthday present for her; but she had discretion enough not to utter her thoughts.

"Don't you think that turning to the left would lead us in the direction of the Priory?" said Kate, who was a little proud of owning the organ of locality.

"Certainly it would," said Thyrza, instantly turning into it, although she knew quite well there could be no safe egress from the wood on that side. But this was not her doing, but Kate's, she argued to herself.

So the two walked on. Now that there was no doubt about it, Thyrza owned that it was

certainly growing dark, and said she hoped no poachers were about. "There was a fearful to-do here last October," she said, in a tone which had not the effect of reassuring Kate, who entirely forgot that it was too early in the year for poachers.

"It is rather chilly," she said presently.

"Well, turn your dress over your shoulders. Hark! what was that?"

It was in reality nothing, but Thyrza felt that Kate had been finding fault with her after a fashion, and she thought she would be revenged. So she made the most of every little noise that could be heard in the stillness, in a way which made her companion heartily wish she had never come.

CHAPTER IV.

It grew very dark in the wood. The crackling of leaves and twigs under the girls' feet, and now and then a rustling among the underwood as of some animal passing, sounded with a distinctness which in the daylight would never have been noticed. Once or twice Kate thought she heard the sound of a distant shout, but Thyrsa said it was only fancy, and the two walked on in silence.

On through a path which became every moment more difficult to tread. Briars stretched long trailing arms across it, and after a while the track disappeared entirely, and as they groped and stumbled along, the shining supple twigs of the hazels which they pushed back rebounded with sudden jerks, and struck their faces, while the branches a little higher swept against their foreheads, and caught in their hair

in a manner, to say the least of it, very tormenting and bewildering.

"What's that?" said Kate in a startled whisper, as a sharp cry of some creature in pain sounded close by.

"A rabbit, or something caught in a trap," said Thyrza; "mind where you step, Kate, or you will get your foot into one."

So poor Kate, what with the trees above, and the fear of probable traps below, had enough to do. She was not naturally a coward, but still it was very far from pleasant to be roaming about at night in a dark wood, with the knowledge that her absence was causing a deal of anxiety to her friends. She could not take it as Thyrza did, who evidently enjoyed the adventure. But then Kate did not know that her companion was taking a wicked pleasure in the knowledge that she was frightening her aunt.

"Isn't there a moon?" said Kate at last."

"I believe so, but I don't know when it rises; but I fancy it will be before long, because some of them thought they would wait to see the ruins by moonlight."

But no friendly gleam struggled through the branches. Happily it was a warm night, though Kate shivered a little from time to time. At

last something less decided in the darkness arrested her attention, and she said,—

“Surely we have got to the end of the wood?”

“In a minute,” said Thyrza. “Now for a final struggle;” and she pulled Kate through a tangled mass of thorns and brushwood, leaving the crown of her hat and half the skirt of her dress behind her; but that was nothing, she thought, compared with the relief of getting free at last. She wondered that Thyrza could be so cool about everything.

The faintest glimmer of light shone upon something immediately before the girls; beyond they could just discern in the distance dark objects which were evidently trees, but this—just before them—

“What is it?” asked Kate, shivering afresh, for it seemed cooler here than in the wood.

“It is only the river,” said Thyrza, who had known all along to what they were coming.

“But there is no bridge,” gasped Kate.

“Of course not. This is four miles from the Priory at least, and six from the plank which crosses it in the meadows.”

“Then what shall we do?”

“Oh, we can walk along by the side.”

“But is there a path?”

“I should not think there is.”

"Then perhaps we shall fall in ; river banks are so treacherous, the grass grows thick, and it is so swampy underneath."

"Well, it can't be helped ; we must do our best ; it's great fun, anyhow."

Kate did not think so, but she gathered up her tattered skirts and followed Thyrza.

There was something wierd and awful in the aspect of the river seen in the very doubtful light. It seemed to Kate like some silent living thing, gliding by them in supreme unconsciousness of her beating heart and weary feet. So mysterious it seemed too in its solemn silence ; a silence never broken except now and then by the soft whispering of its waters among the rushes that fringed its banks, and once by the splash and ripple caused by a water-rat which dived into the stream close to her feet. The girls found it very difficult to keep a secure footing : either they had to grope almost on their hands and knees to find a safe place to step in, or they had in sudden haste to grasp any overhanging branches which stretched out from the wood ; and as these were often covered with thorns, the help they afforded was less acceptable than it might have been.

"Have we much farther to go ?" asked Kate,

after a terrible buffeting with some of these branches.

"I don't know ; but perhaps the moon will rise soon, and then we shall see well enough."

Presently they came to some willows and alders, the whispering of whose leaves in the cool night air sounded audibly as the girls passed. Happily the bank, for about a mile or more, was fringed with them, so that there was something to cling to, and the ground was so very miry that, unaided, they could scarcely have kept up. Kate felt too frightened to talk ; but Thyrsa, full of enjoyment at the thought of the consternation she was causing at home, laughed and chattered in a way which added tenfold to Kate's fears. Suddenly a loud "moo" from somewhere quite near so startled her that she called out hastily :—

"Oh, Thyrsa, what is that?"

"Only a poor cow, you little goose. That is a meadow opposite, and full of cows, of course. Well, don't be frightened, we are not going to cross it."

"Oh, I am not afraid of *cows*," said Kate, roused into asserting herself a little ; "it was only the sudden noise. And surely the moon must be rising ; I can see the cows, or something like them, lying in the field."

The dark, indistinct objects gradually took

shape and form, and presently, from behind the distant trees, appeared the silvery light, and Kate took courage.

It was difficult still to find a safe way along the bank, but in the midst of her anxiety to keep up, she could not help noticing the track of the moonbeams on the silent water, and the glistening of the willow leaves as they waved backwards and forwards. Presently, after many twistings and turnings of the river's course, they came opposite something dark and still on the farther side of the stream, and as the moonlight, emerging from the screen of a grove of trees behind, shone upon the building, Kate exclaimed :—

“ That must be the Priory, Thyrsa !”

“ Of course it is.”

“ But it's on the other side of the stream.”

Thyrsa laughed. “ What of that ?” she said.

“ But I don't remember crossing the river when we came.”

“ We did, though, for all that. There is a low bridge, and the top of it is flat and turfed over ; you know the stream is narrower here than it is farther down.”

“ Then are we near the bridge ?”

“ Very near. Mind, Kate, it's dreadfully slippery just here. Now, here we are ! take a

good high step, and hold fast. There ! now we are on level ground, and there's the Priory before us."

"But we are still seven miles from home !"

"Never mind that !"

"I can't think why no one has come in search of us," said Kate, as they crossed the broad smooth bridge ; "it seems very odd."

"Not at all. The wood extends ever so far in the other direction ; and when people go in search of others they always take the wrong turning ; it's a sort of instinct, I suppose," and Thyrza laughed.

Kate thought it no laughing matter, but she said nothing. Only she stopped to look at the old ruin with the silver light upon its broken pillars, and the fine tracery of its windows ; but the moonbeams, by bringing some parts into clear relief, threw the rest into dense shade, and Kate felt it was very solemn and awful indeed.

"Just the time and place for a ghost story," said Thyrza. "Shall I tell you one ?"

"Not for the world. Let us go on."

"Here are some bits of paper left to tell of the day's revel," said Thyrza, "and——."

But here Kate was much alarmed at seeing her fall all her length on the ground.

"It's one of those horrid croquet hoops," said

Thyrza, picking herself up. "I wish people would be careful."

"I dare say they were in too great a state to mind what they were doing," said Kate. "Well, what shall we do now?"

"Find our way home, I suppose."

"But seven miles! I don't think I can do it," said Kate wearily.

"Oh dear! what a baby you are! it is no distance to speak of."

"Not for your long legs perhaps, but mine are very tired;" and Kate sank down on a stone.

"Oh, if you begin to *think* about being tired, of course you will be done up at once. It's ridiculous to give way;—come along."

So poor Kate stumbled to her feet. She had no angry excitement to keep her up as Thyrza had, and she was feeling very weary. She ventured to say as they turned from the ruins:—

"Where is the house where Captain Forbes got the boat?"

"Oh, half a mile down the stream, quite out of the way."

"But don't you think they would take us in and let us finish the night there? and perhaps some one could go on to South Walford and tell them we are safe."

"You can go if you like; I shan't."

It seemed unkind to leave Thyrsa to walk home alone, so, after beseeching a little longer, Kate yielded, and presently they found themselves in the road.

"There's a light!" said Kate suddenly. "Where is it?"

"I want you to tell me that," said Thyrsa, scornfully, "for I don't see it myself; how you do fancy things!"

"But it is there," persisted Kate; "look to the left."

"Oh, that's the boatman's cottage."

"Well, then you may be sure some one is waiting up for us. Captain Forbes would be sure to tell them when he had done with the boat. I shall call, anyhow."

The first shout met with no answer, but the second was more successful. From some distance off, but still quite clearly, sounded an answering call, "Hollo there!"

"What a voice you have!" said Thyrsa. "Well, why don't you answer?"

Kate's heart was almost too full to allow her to do so, but she called again, and presently a man's form was seen coming across the field, and in another minute or two he was quite near them.

"Be you the young ladies as 'as lost themselves?"

"Yes," said Kate.

Thyrza stood by in cold indifference, holding the stray croquet hoop in her hand.

"Well, come along o' me," said the man, kindly; the captain he'll be back in a little while, and Parson too. Why, whatever made you stray away in this fashion, eh? scarin' every one out of their wits."

"We lost ourselves in the wood," said Kate in a tired voice, while Thyrza stalked on by her side.

"And which way did you come out?"

"Oh, somewhere by the river, ever so far off. What time is it?"

"Later than you'd think for," said the man, wondering how it was that the smaller of the two young ladies did all the talking, while the other held her head up so high.

"I was afraid it was very late; they must have been so frightened at home."

"Never mind that; I'll soon set that right. Peggy's all ready to have her harness put on, and we'll put some chairs in the cart, and there you'll be as comfortable as possible. Now, then, miss, this stile's a pretty high one, let me lend a hand."

He helped Kate over, but Thyrza had followed before he could do the same kind office

for her, and then the open cottage door was reached, and Kate stumbled to a chair and sat down.

"I've brought 'em," said the boatman, with some pride. "Now for some tea, old woman."

His wife, who was deaf, and in ordinary circumstances required a deal of shouting to make her understand, comprehended the present state of affairs at a glance. The kettle was on the fire, and in a very few minutes she had brought out bread and butter, and placed a steaming cup of tea before each of the girls.

Kate took hers gratefully, and Thyrza unbent a little, but protested that she was not in the least tired.

"Wouldn't you like to stay the night here, miss?" said the old woman, looking with compassion at Kate's pale, tired face. "The other young lady don't seem quite so dead beat. Come now, there's a nice little room at the back."

Kate thanked her, and would probably have been persuaded had not the sound of voices outside caught her ear. In another moment the captain and Mr. Sutcliffe came in, and Kate threw herself, with a great burst of tears, into her uncle's arms.

Thyrza looked on with a curl of the lip as if

she despised Kate, and replied to all the inquiries that "she was all right; it was nothing to make a fuss about; it was not likely they should have come to any harm."

"Well, now for home as soon as possible. Giles, I will send my groom back with the cart in good time to-morrow," said Mr. Sutcliffe, "only we must be off now."

Captain Forbes took possession of two chairs to place in the cart, which the old man bustled off to get ready, and in a few minutes the girls were seated, and Peggy urged to do her best to take them home.

Miss Thornton's distress and terror had been great; and when Thyrza was at last sleeping quietly in her own bed, in that pretty south room which Cousin Deborah had chosen for her when she grew too big for her crib, she could not resist the impulse to go and look at her from time to time to assure herself of her safety.

At noon Thyrza came down and ate her breakfast, seemingly none the worse for her adventure, and laughingly scornful of her aunt's fears and thankfulness. Not a word of sorrow for being the cause of so much anxiety passed her lips, but this Miss Thornton scarcely expected; it was not Thyrza's way.

That evening, as Cousin Deborah was sitting

in the drawing-room, overlooking the lawn, she saw Kate come up to Thyrza and say something to her ; there was no response except a shrug of the shoulders, and Kate turned away and came to Miss Thornton. The poor child still looked pale and weary, and the tears would not be kept back as she threw herself into the arms held out to her, and said :

“ Oh Miss Thornton, dear, I am so very, *very* sorry for giving you so much trouble. I hope you have forgiven us both.”

“ Poor little Kate, I should be cruel indeed if I blamed you for what neither of you could help. Don't trouble any more, dear, I am so very thankful to know you are both safe. Are you sure you are none the worse ?”

“ Oh, no ; I am all right, thank you ;” but she did not leave the shelter of Miss Thornton's arms, and she from time to time gave a silent caress to the head on her lap, thinking all the while of that other child, her own adopted darling, who had shown no sign of sorrow for the trouble she had given, and was at this very moment doing her best to spoil her aunt's dahlias and geraniums by switching them with her riding-whip.

“ Have you nothing to say to me, Thyrza

dear ?" she asked later, when Thyrza was in bed, tired, though she would not own it.

"To say about what?" asked Thyrza, impatiently, and turning her sullen face away from the loving, anxious one which was bending over her.

Miss Thornton had a good deal of pride in her composition, and she had conquered no little before bringing herself to ask that question; but she felt that confession would be good for Thyrza, and she had said this to help her.

"Surely you know, my darling?"

"How should I? Oh, do go, aunt; it's so hot, and I want to go to sleep."

And Miss Thornton left her, and went back to the drawing-room with a very aching heart.

CHAPTER V.

"WHAT have I left undone?" asked Cousin Deborah of Mr. Gibson four years later, when the disagreeable child of twelve had grown into a still more disagreeable girl of sixteen. "Where does my mistake lie?"

Mr. Gibson felt much for his cousin, as he said very kindly, as if he grieved to inflict pain, "Over-indulgence, Deborah; nothing more nor less."

"But indulgence would never have hurt *me*; I should have a less bitter memory of my childhood and youth if I had had more of it; and," added Miss Thornton, gravely, "I believe I should have been a better woman."

Mr. Gibson looked at her, and thought that at least she would have had a mind more evenly balanced. But he only said gravely:

"You must remember that we are not all constituted alike; what is life to one may be

death to another. You were not likely ever to take advantage of kindness—noble minds never do.” Then, fearing he had by his remark condemned Thyrza, he added quickly, “But forgive me if I say that obedience is a child’s first duty, and I don’t think Thyrza ever learnt it.”

“But I remember when quite a little child that dear, kind Mrs. May spent a week at the Parkers’; it was only a short time, but she was so good to me, I would have done anything for her from pure love, quite of my own accord. Oh, I think if there is but love, obedience is sure to follow.”

“Undoubtedly. Still, it ought to be made a matter of principle in the first instance.”

“Then what am I to do? for although I have a show of control over Thyrza, it is but a show. How shall I act?”

“Make it a reality. Draw the curb-rein, or she will break loose altogether.”

Miss Thornton sighed. It was a sad case, and she felt it keenly. For a little while she said nothing as she walked by her cousin’s side up and down the lawn. The Cottage, always pretty, was looking its best and brightest in the clear light of an early September morning. The sun gleamed upon its windows, and the

thin smoke from the antique chimneys curled upwards, and dissolved itself seemingly into the clouds, which only served to make the colour of the sky more intensely blue ; and on the walls of dark brick the luxuriant creepers were wearing their brightest aspect ; for blossom and leaf intermingled everywhere, and formed a rich drapery of festoons. There were two gables ; in one, the lower room on the ground-floor was the dining-room, in the other the drawing-room. From the latter sounded the tones of a piano in a brilliant waltz, played with a crisp, clear touch, to which, as they reached the end of the lawn nearest the house, Mr. Gibson stopped to listen.

"She plays well," he remarked, as he turned back again.

"She does," assented Miss Thornton, not, however, adding that the waltz in question had caused some little disturbance lately, because she would persist in practising it solely, and neglecting other and more important pieces.

They continued their walk in silence. It was a peaceful spot, and one which Cousin Deborah herself could well appreciate, only, alas ! there was an element of discord in her life, which jarred too frequently upon her deepest feelings for harmony to reign there, and a sense of a

great want unsatisfied made her heart ache this fair autumnal morning.

"When is Ellen coming to see us again?" she asked presently.

"In a week or two perhaps; it will do her good."

"And not her only: I cannot tell you, John, how Ellen rests me."

Mr. Gibson looked kindly at his cousin.

"Yes," he said, "she does that with most tired souls; but, Deborah, I don't like to think you should be so weary; and you are sadly worn—as thin as a thread-paper; that should not be."

"There never was much of me," said Miss Thornton, forcing a smile; "and when appetite goes, and one cannot sleep, the result is only what one must look for."

Unfortunately there was no need to ask *why* she could not sleep; he had been a week at South Walford, and in that time had seen quite enough to make him very wide awake to the fact that Thyrza was doing her best to wear out her god-mother. He was not a man to waste words, and his next question was whether it would not be better to send Thyrza to school.

"You are thinking of the discipline?"

"Yes, partly; she needs that in a great

degree. Then, too, it would be good for her to mix with girls probably cleverer than herself. Here she is in advance of others of her age, for the rectory girls strike me as being rather dull by comparison."

"They are," said Miss Thornton, with some pride; though a minute after her tone changed as she added: "But I would sacrifice a good deal of her superiority in that way to see her as loving and obedient to me as they are to their mother."

"Yes, they are good children," said Mr. Gibson, musingly.

"I cannot understand it," continued Miss Thornton; "I did not undertake it in my own strength; I have sought wisdom, and yet I don't know—perhaps I have not always followed the promptings I have had, but have done according to my own ideas instead."

"That is what we commonly do, no matter whether we ask advice of earthly friends or guidance from God. Too often our minds are made up before we ask, and then the request seems only the discharge of a duty, not the single-minded search for wisdom and direction which it should be. You are not singular there, Deborah."

"But not the less wrong."

"Quite true."

"I took myself for a guide, and, knowing what had been my great need, thought hers must be the same. It has been a sad mistake."

"We all make mistakes," said Mr. Gibson, kindly ; "perhaps in nothing more than in the training of children. But take heart, Deborah ; there is nothing 'too hard for the Lord.'"

By which speech, though it brought comfort with it, Miss Thornton was convinced that the case was considered a very difficult one indeed.

Mr. Gibson left Walford that afternoon, and the next day something occurred which reminded his cousin of the words, "Draw the curb-rein ;" and though to insist upon a thing for her own sake was what she had never done, she thought of Thyrza's good, and began :

"Thyrza, my darling, you have not practised your new overture, and when Mr. Field comes to-morrow you will not know it."

No answer.

As the two sat that afternoon within the deep bow of the drawing-room window, Thyrza looking out, and Miss Thornton with her wistful gaze fixed upon the young face opposite, they very fairly represented two not uncommon types of womanhood. Cousin Deborah was very

small, but well made, and in proportion ; her figure was quite girlish, and the hands just now folded on her lap were white and thin. Her face was grave and sad, but it was a very pleasant face to look at, with its well-cut, sensitive features, and the stamp of refinement upon it. But the brow was far from smooth, and the cheeks were hollow, so that the soft outline which might have made her really good-looking was wanting.

But whatever the past fifteen years had done for Thyrza, they had left a very decided mark for good upon *her*. Mrs. Gibson was accustomed to regret the absence of the petulant ways of expression which in earlier days had been a part of Cousin Deborah ; but even she felt that her cousin had gained by the loss of that self-assertion which had had its origin in the despised and trampled-down condition of her youth. Desire for her own comfort had been merged by degrees in her solicitude for the child of her adoption, and the result had been the toning down of her somewhat discordant nature, till one forgot how inharmonious the parts had seemed when she was young. Her hair, which was soft and fine, and had been of a glossy black, was now fast changing to grey, and this made her look even older than her

care-worn expression had power to do ; for in compensation, it would seem, for having missed her youth at its proper time, the spirit of it had come to her later, so that the children at the rectory, and those who loved her most, never thought of her as growing old. For there was plenty of love around her, which she felt as one feels a soft, pleasant atmosphere, but which could not make up for the one want always unsatisfied. Had there been no one dearer still, the rectory girls would have been altogether her delight, for she loved them all ; but Thyrza's coldness only made the difference more marked, and, as is the way with most of us, the thing she had not was the thing she cared for most, so that the affection which surrounded her on all sides but one was comparatively unappreciated. "I must insist upon obedience," she thought now, looking at Thyrza, "but I question if I shall succeed."

Thyrza at sixteen was a tall, fine-looking girl, with a good figure, and hands and feet, though large, still fairly shaped, and in proportion to her height. Her head was well set on her shoulders, and she had a way of arranging her very coarse black hair so as to set it off to the best advantage. Her complexion was sallow, but she took care always to have some bright

colour about her dress, which might help to remedy this defect. She had very thick eyebrows, almost meeting, and her brow wore a scowl now and then which was far from pleasant. She had dark eyes, with a world of defiance in them, and both nose and lips were thick. There was plenty of determination in the square under jaw, and the whole face had sufficient character in it to make it strike any one who saw it for the first time. Whether the impression thus made would be favourable or otherwise, depended entirely upon the mood Thyrsa was in. She could be amiable, and also she could be (and this was most frequently the case) very much the reverse. That she should not have answered Miss Thornton's remark was in itself an unfavourable sign, but she did speak, when the remark was repeated, in a tone rather more emphatic than at first.

"Well, and if I don't know it, it is no concern of his; he will get paid all the same."

"But, Thyrsa, a true master is anxious to see his pupils improve; and I don't really like to hear you speak in that way of him, dear; it is not ladylike."

"I am not going to practise to-day; I have a library book to finish."

"But, Thyrsa, I wish you to practise."

Thyrza only shrugged her shoulders, and again the words, "Draw the curb-rein," came into Miss Thornton's mind.

"Thyrza, I wish you to practise."

"And I don't wish."

"Then you must obey against your wish," said Cousin Deborah, much more decidedly than was usual with her.

The girl did not stir, and Miss Thornton sat for more than five minutes not quite certain what to do. Then she went up to Thyrza, and laid her hand gently on her shoulder. It was immediately shaken off.

"Thyrza, my darling."

"Oh, don't bother."

"But, Thyrza, you must hear me ; you are not a child, to indulge in pettish ways. I wish you to practise, my dear ; and you must either do that, or go to your own room for the remainder of the day. I must be obeyed."

Thyrza flung herself away from the touch of the kind hand which was now smoothing her dark hair—out of the room, upstairs, where she locked herself into her bedroom, while Cousin Deborah wondered what to do next, for certainly Thyrza had mastered her. Then she took out a pretty little muslin apron she was

making for her unruly charge, and sighed often and sadly over her work.

Upstairs Thyrza first finished her book, and then sat at the window looking out. "Hateful place!" she said, with her eyes on the soft green lawn and its gay flower-borders—"hateful place! I wish I could leave it! I wonder who would be slave to an old maid's fancies if she could help herself? Such a little insignificant bit of a thing, too, that I could carry in my arms! Practise? No! I might have done so if she had not bothered me; but she has no right to lord it over me; she is not my mother, not even my governess."

"No, Thyrza, but a friend who for nearly fifteen years has loved you as if you were her own child; fed you, clothed you, and given you every advantage of education and society. What *right* has she to order you, Thyrza? Think again!"

Thus conscience spoke, but Thyrza would not listen. She had stifled similar reproaches too often to take much heed now, and she went on inwardly grumbling, and railing against things in general and Miss Thornton in particular.

There was a gate of communication between the Cottage garden and that of the rectory; it had been placed there principally for Thyrza's

benefit when she was a little girl, and it was still constantly used, as it saved the long walk round by the churchyard and the front of the Cottage. Through this gate, as Thyrza sat looking out, she saw Mrs. Sutcliffe enter with little May, her youngest girl, a child of five.

"Now she will be holding me up as a warning to that little monkey," said Thyrza to herself. "Well, it does not matter." Nevertheless, if there had been any means of discovering what was going on downstairs, she would not have scrupled to profit thereby.

Miss Thornton had left the window and was writing when Mrs. Sutcliffe entered. There was a look in her eyes as of tears not long shed, and the grasp of her hand unconsciously told tales—unconsciously, for she was not in the habit of exposing her god-daughter's deficiencies even to the rector's wife, dear friend as she was.

"May and I are just come from seeing poor old Betsy Reynolds. She is sinking evidently, and not able to take much notice; but she asked for you, so I told her I would tell you."

"You are very kind," said Miss Thornton, who for many weeks past had not missed her daily visit to the poor old woman. If Thyrza had been only commonly amiable, it would have

been easy to go this afternoon as usual ; but, under the circumstances, she had felt it right to stay at home. Now she scarcely knew what to do, and Mrs. Sutcliffe saw her hesitation.

"Is there anything that I can do for you that will set you at liberty ?" she asked.

"No, thank you ; it is only Thyrza."

"Only Thyrza" meant a good deal to any one who knew her, and Mrs. Sutcliffe sent May into the garden before asking, "Where is she ?"

"Upstairs." Miss Thornton did not add that she had been troublesome, but her friend inferred it.

"The girls want her to come on Friday, if possible ; Fanny has some new duets which she wishes her to try, and there was some talk of a trio if Thyrza were disposed to take part in it. Perhaps you will tell her this as she is not forthcoming."

"Yes, I will tell her. Now I suppose it would be better to go to poor old Betsy at once. What do you think ?"

"As soon as you can, certainly. Shall I stay till you come back in case Thyrza should come down ?"

"She will not do that. But do as you like, I shall be glad to find you here on my return ;

but don't think me rude if I do not send for the child."

This opened Mrs. Sutcliffe's eyes very widely ; and she understood, what Miss Thornton would not say, that she did not wish to risk a refusal by summoning her.

"Mamma," cried May, coming in at the open window, "Mrs. Forbes' carriage is at our gate."

This altered the course of events. Mrs. Sutcliffe went home as soon as Miss Thornton had put on her bonnet.

The two ladies crossed the lawn together, and left the garden by the gate among the laurels, May following them ; and as from her window Thyrsa saw the horses, and knew from the servants' livery whose carriage it was, she felt greatly aggrieved. What did her aunt care so long as *she* was out of the way ? Of course she was going to have a gossip with Mrs. Forbes, and she was left at home alone ; but that was of no consequence, oh no, not the least !

Meanwhile Miss Thornton was crossing the churchyard with a very heavy heart. She did not like to leave Thyrsa, but then what was she to do ? It was Thyrsa's own fault, and poor old Betsy ought not to be neglected. She tried to put disquieting thoughts aside, and have a mind

free to attend to the poor woman, but it was not easy to do so.

"It's Miss Thornton, mother," said a woman by the bedside as Cousin Deborah entered.

The look which Betsy turned upon her said plainly enough how welcome she was, and it brought some little comfort to her heart as she noticed it.

"I knew ye'd come ; I said so, though the day seemed a long one ; well, long or short, time is nearly over for me, it's eternity I'm thinking of, and the thought dazes me sorely ; but there, it won't be bewildering when I am once in it."

" 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty ; they shall behold the land which is very far off,' " quoted Miss Thornton ; " one needs something to fix one's mind upon, or the vagueness is oppressive," she added, " and the King will be the chief attraction of heaven to us, I think ; and so do you, Betsy, only you bewilder yourself with wondering about what you will take quite naturally when once you are there."

It was necessary to talk simply to the child-like old woman, and she understood Miss Thornton's meaning. " Yes, yes, things in this world come by slow degrees ; I know learning A B C did to poor Stephen when he was a boy ; but now there's no bounds to what he can read

by means of them letters, for all it would have crazed him to think of it then."

"Well, then, trouble yourself no more about the endlessness of the life to come ; think of the joy, the peace, the rest,—the satisfaction, think of that."

Miss Thornton lingered over the last word as if it embodied everything, and she felt almost a desire to be as near it as Betsy was, only she was aware there might be rebellion in such a thought, and she checked it.

"I should like that hymn you sang to me yesterday," said Betsy, "if it's not troubling you, ma'am."

So, in St. Bernard's grand old words Miss Thornton sang of the "dear, dear country," whither old Betsy was hastening, and her heart grew quiet as she sang.

The western sky was all aglow with the sun drawing near to its setting ; far off in the fields were voices heard clearly, yet not unpleasantly, in the still air, and nearer home the peaceful farmyard sounds came in at the open window as the words of the hymn, so universally dear, fell with a calming power on Betsy's tired mind. She was more than ninety, and had had a hard life, which was now drawing very near its close. Miss Thornton sat quite still for a few minutes

when she had finished, and then she rose to go. Betsy had fallen asleep with the yellow glow from the sky on her withered face. Her breathing was very gentle and still, and Miss Thornton thought she would probably pass away without waking. She did not disturb her as she moved from the room, but with a silent "Good afternoon" to the daughter (herself nearly seventy), she went downstairs and out into the evening air.

She had for a time forgotten her cares; it had refreshed her to breathe the atmosphere of peace which had come with the words of the hymn, and she walked slowly home.

Thyrza had not changed her position by the window. She had watched the carriage drive away from the rectory, and had wondered why her aunt did not return.

Presently she heard her step on the stairs as she came up to take off her bonnet, and after a while she heard her go down again. A few minutes afterwards one of the servants brought her tea and knocked for admission.

"You can put it down."

The maid obeyed, and Thyrza, who, while she scorned the provider, liked the good things provided, made a very substantial meal indeed.

She lighted a candle, and sat in a very angry,

rebellious mood till nine o'clock, when she undressed and lay down. An hour afterwards Miss Thornton came in with her quiet step, and bent down over the head of the unruly girl she loved so devotedly, and blessed her.

Thyrza was only feigning sleep, and the words smote her a little, but she took no notice, and Cousin Deborah only lingered to re-arrange the curtains more comfortably, and then she moved towards the door.

“Did you speak, darling?”

No answer, and with a sad heart Miss Thornton went to her room.

An hour afterwards Thyrza rose, re-lighted her candle, and began carefully to open the drawers of her wardrobe, taking out all that was most valuable, packing a large carpet bag very tightly, then proceeding to fill a small box, and finally making up a large paper parcel. All the little ornaments which one loving heart had chosen for her, Thyrza packed safely in her carpet bag, thinking how much money they would make should she need it.

All that possibly could go in such small compass she squeezed in, planning all the while how she would make her escape.

“She need not think she is going to order me in that fashion, because I won't bear it. I have

been here all these years, and it's rather too late to begin. I know who is at the bottom of it—hateful man! there is only one person I detest more, and that's his wife. 'Be grateful, Thyrsa, for your good home, and the friend who is more than a mother to you!' I fancy I hear her now. Grateful, indeed! If she did adopt me she did it to please herself. She would have made a pet of something else—a canary, or parrot, or anything—if she had not taken me. I have been a plaything quite long enough. To order me to practise indeed! to tell me I *must*! Oh, won't there be a fuss to-morrow when I'm missing!"

So far from disturbing her, this thought seemed to give Thyrsa fresh energy, and she finished her packing, dressed, and lay down to wait for the dawn. Her plan was to carry her things to the cross-roads two miles off, where a coach stopped every morning at half-past six, and went on to the station of a town five miles further, where she knew she would be in time for the London train. There was a branch line at South Walford, but she would not risk discovery at the small station.

It seems wonderful that she could lie there in the darkness calmly making plans, the carrying out of which would bring desolation and misery to the kind friend who had watched over her so

long, and who was even now trying to rest her aching heart on the words, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." Yes, she must wait ; she knew she was naturally impatient, and it was only to be expected that in training such a disposition as Thyrza's there should be need of forbearance and longsuffering. The child would come to herself in time, and be all she could wish, and she must wait and trust.

Perhaps she had been wilful in taking her at the first, too confident in her own strength and power of love to draw out what was good in her, and root out what was bad. Besides, Mr. Gibson had plainly shown her the mistake she had made, and now she must try and rectify it. But she would be careful not to be too strict at first, and she began to plan some little pleasures for Thyrza, which might prove to her that she did not wish to be tyrannical. First there was the musical evening which Mrs. Sutcliffe had proposed ; if Thyrza were only in the mood for it, that would be a very charming distraction ; and on Saturday, perhaps, they would call on Mrs. Forbes ; that would be another break in the monotony of her life, which Thyrza so often grumbled at. Then something recalled old Betsy to her mind, and she won-

dered whether she had entered into rest ; and as thought succeeded thought, gradually the sleep which had seemed far enough off half an hour ago, laid its soft touch on her eyelids at the moment when Thyrza rose from her bed to escape from the protection of which she was so tired.

The sun that had shone with such a yellow light on poor old Betsy's face the evening before, had set behind some very watery clouds ; and when, as morning dawned, Thyrza noiselessly opened the window to look out, she was not surprised to find it raining steadily.

Nothing seemed to intimidate her ; for though, as a rule, she never would do any work for herself, or carry even a basket of flowers if she could help it, she thought nothing now of the box, and bag, and parcel, which she would have to drag for two miles in the wet.

There was no time to spare now, so she removed all traces of unusual disturbance from the room, and prepared for flight. She knew she could easily jump to the leads of the bow-window of the drawing-room beneath her, and let herself down by means of the trellis to the grass below ; but how to get down her luggage ? She thought of the sheets, but rejected the idea, and then tied two large shawls together, by means of which, with a great deal of manage-

ment, she lowered her box and bag; then, throwing down the parcel, she took her umbrella and got out.

She knew how to take care of herself, and a complete suit of waterproof, with the hood of her cloak drawn over her head, protected her from the rain, which was falling fast as she alighted on the leads. She reached the ground without difficulty, took one look round, which convinced her that no one was about, and then, with her umbrella and bag in one hand, her box in the other, the parcel tied round her waist, and the two shawls over her arm, she set off across the lawn and by unfrequented ways till she found herself at the cross-roads just five minutes before the time, very tired and hot with so much unusual exertion, and glad to put down her luggage on the ground.

The coach came up. There was no other inside passenger, and no one noticed her. Since the branch line at South Walford had been opened the old mode of conveyance had fallen a good deal into disuse; but it was still no uncommon thing for people living near where it passed to take advantage of it, especially on rainy mornings; and as Thyrza was unknown to the guard, he did not look at her particularly, being apparently absorbed in endeavours to keep off

the rain, which was now pouring in torrents. Spite of it, however, Thyrza could make out in the distance houses which she knew, and once, as the coach went slowly uphill, she saw the tower of the village church, and even the chimneys of the cottage which she had so recently left. Then other houses came in view, and gradually the scene changed to one quite fresh to her, and South Walford, with her despised friends, was left far behind.

Once she felt slightly uneasy when the coach stopped at a wayside cottage, but it was only to take up a parcel; though there was so much delay about it that she felt sure a passenger was coming, and drew her veil more closely over her face, leaning back in her corner, prepared to elude the prying of curious eyes. "For country people were always inquisitive, and ready to meddle with any business which did not concern them," she said to herself, in her proud scorn of everybody.

At last, after some joking on the part of the guard with the woman at the cottage-door, the parcel was handed up, and the coach was off again. It stopped no more till it arrived at the station, where she again took up her possessions, paid her fare, and, refusing all offers of assistance, marched off to the booking office.

"A mighty independent young woman that!" she overheard the guard say to the coachman, and the words made her cheeks burn.

Perhaps it would have been better if she had let some one carry her parcels; it would not do to excite suspicion. However, it was too late now to act differently, but it would make her careful in future.

The station was at first unusually empty, which was vexing, for it would have been comparatively easy to escape notice in a crowd; but by degrees several people came in, and then she put on an air of indifference, and asked for a third-class ticket to London. Next she looked for an empty carriage, but would not enter it till the train was ready to start, and she was sure of being alone. No one was likely to take notice of her on the platform, she felt sure, under the shade of her umbrella, and clad in the long grey waterproof, which was like a great many other cloaks of the kind, and not noticeable for anything. So she left the other passengers, who preferred the shelter of the waiting-room, and stood, glad to see the numbers increasing as the hour approached, and watching intently every one who passed till she thought it time to take her seat.

She put in her parcels, and then followed and

shut the door. In another minute the train was off, and she felt secure in the solitude of the dingy-looking carriage, from which, on former occasions of travelling, she would have turned away in disgust, as fit only for labourers and "that sort of people." Now it suited her purpose to take advantage of the cheapness of fare. She was not of a liberal disposition, and had saved a good deal of money, so that she was very fairly provided for, for a time at least; but she did not know exactly what would become of her (though she had formed her own plans), and thought that she might probably have need of all that she could save. So for this reason, quite as much as to avoid detection, she went third-class.

CHAPTER VI.

AGITATION of mind had kept Cousin Deborah awake so long that she slept much later than usual in the morning. It was still raining when at nine o'clock she went into the breakfast-room, cosy and pretty even in wet weather, and made the tea.

Thyrza did not appear when the prayer-bell rang, but this was not unusual, and it was not till she had nearly finished breakfast that Miss Thornton rang the bell, and desired one of the servants to tell Miss Thyrza how late it was.

The maid returned, saying that Miss Thyrza was not there. There was nothing in the appearance of the room to excite suspicion ; but, remembering yesterday, a vague uneasiness came over Cousin Deborah, and she went all over the house, only to come back to her unfinished breakfast with a very heavy heart, for she felt sure something was wrong. She sent

for the cook, a faithful servant who had been with her in the peaceful days when she and her kind old uncle had been all in all to each other ; days so far away now, with a kind of halo over them such as is apt to gather, whether appropriately or not, over the past when the present is full of pain. Thyrza was no favourite, but, for Miss Thornton's sake, the good old servant made another search.

"I don't know what to do," said Cousin Deborah, on finding search and inquiry useless—except so far that the carpet bag and box were missing, and a good deal of clothing. In the midst of her great bewilderment of sorrow poor Miss Thornton took comfort from the fact that Thyrza's Bible, Prayer Book, and hymn-book were gone ; she thought it spoke well for "the child," never dreaming that they had only been taken with a view to the keeping up of appearances.

One thing was plain—that she had gone away. But how ? alone ? and whither ? Poor Miss Thornton, her heart seemed to stand still as she thought of it.

Presently she put on her bonnet and cloak, and went in the pouring rain through the laurel-gate into the rectory garden. May from the window saw her coming, and called out,

"Mamma, here is Miss Thornton ; she is coming through all this rain ; what can be the matter ?"

Ah ! what indeed ? Mrs. Sutcliffe remembered that Thyrza had been in her room yesterday afternoon, possibly self-banished—she did not know ; only she felt sure something had gone sadly awry, so that she was not so unprepared for the sudden appearance of Miss Thornton as May was ; but she never dreamed the truth. They were great friends, and very intimate, so that an early visit like this was not uncommon, although she could not recollect that Miss Thornton had ever come in the rain.

"Run upstairs, May, it is school-time ;" and the child obeyed, though she was burning with curiosity to know why Miss Thornton had come so early, and all through the rain too.

"Is anything the matter ?" asked Mrs. Sutcliffe, who had gone to the door to meet her.

"Thyrza," was all the answer, and Miss Thornton went into the drawing-room.

She sat down, and Mrs. Sutcliffe tried to take off her cloak ; but the action seemed to rouse Miss Thornton, and she said hurriedly :

"Where is Mr. Sutcliffe ?"

"In the study—I will call him."

"Thank you. Oh, never mind my cloak ; I can't stay. Thyrza is gone ; we cannot find

her anywhere ; and a great many of her things are missing."

"Thyrza gone ! but how ? when ?"

"I don't know. She did not come down to breakfast, and when Jane went to call her she was not in her room. A good many things are missing, and a carpet bag and a small box. I want Mr. Sutcliffe to go to the station and make inquiries, if he will be so kind."

"When was it ?" asked the rector, who had come in.

"I don't know. I left her in bed, and I thought asleep, at ten o'clock last night. She had been—in fact, poor child, I am afraid I was rather harsh to her, and she had been in her room since four o'clock. But I never dreamed of this."

"How did she get away ?"

"By her window, I fancy ; there is nothing to show, for the window is shut, though not fastened ; but she could not have gone by any of the doors, because they were all bolted on the inside."

"And you would like me to go to the station ?" said Mr. Sutcliffe.

"If you please ; can you go at once ?"

"Certainly ;" and in a very short time the clergyman was off.

He went to the station. Not wishing to make his object known, he looked up and down, walked into the booking office, compared his watch with the large clock, and remarked to the clerk, "Not a very pleasant day for travelling, Smithers."

"So most people seem to fancy, sir, for we've not booked a passenger yet. Where for, sir?"

"Oh, I don't want a ticket; I am looking for some one," replied Mr. Sutcliffe, satisfied that Thyrsa had not gone from that station.

"The down train will be in directly, sir."

The clergyman waited for it, and then went back to the rectory; and as Miss Thornton had returned to the Cottage he followed her thither.

The coach was next thought of, but without much hope; and Mr. Sutcliffe went to the Barnwell station, seven miles off, and inquired if a young lady had been set down by it that morning to go by train.

The clerk could not say, nor could the porters. It was raining hard when the London train started; it was a little behind time; there were several passengers, it being market day at the county town, and they had not noticed any one in particular. So, baffled again, the inquirer turned to the inn where the coach was put up, and summoned the coachman.

That functionary was in a drowsy condition, and not very communicative, but the guard was more accessible.

"Young lady, sir? well, I suppose that's what she was, though at first I took her for a young woman going to her place (poor Thyrza!); afterwards I had cause to change my mind."

"In what way?"

"Well, sir, you see she'd three or four pretty tidy-sized bits of baggage with her, carpet bag and so forth; and I offered to carry 'em. But not she! she held her head up as high as you please, and I didn't ask her twice. Not that that proves her a lady, quite the contrary, but she wasn't no servant, that I'm sure of."

"Was she tall?"

"Yes, she was a tidy height."

"And alone?"

"Yes, she was alone."

"Did you see her after she left the coach?"

"No, sir; leastways not after she'd refused my offer to help with her luggage."

This was all that could be got out of the guard, and Mr. Sutcliffe returned to the station to telegraph to London.

"I am in time to catch the early train? I mean if I telegraph now for some one to take notice of the passengers by the early train when

it stops, there will be time?" asked Mr. Sutcliffe.

The clerk shook his head.

"The train was due in London a quarter of an hour ago, sir," he said, "but still there's a chance, it may be behind time."

So Mr. Sutcliffe telegraphed, and waited anxiously for the reply. It was to the effect that the train had come in five minutes before his telegram, and no one had noticed a young lady such as he had described. But further inquiries should be made of the cabmen and others, and the result duly reported. There was nothing for Mr. Sutcliffe to do but to return to Miss Thornton.

He found her contemplating foot-marks and some slight disturbance of the mould in front of the drawing-room window, a broken geranium, and one or two bruised leaves. It was plain enough that Thyrza had made her exit by means of the trellis, for some of the festoons of the passion-flower lay drooping on the ground.

The day had cleared, and the sun shone brilliantly on the twinkling drops which gemmed every flower and leaf in the garden. But the bright beams mocked the darkness of dread and sorrow in her heart, and Miss

Thornton went into the house. As she entered the hall the sound of the church bell struck on her ear, and it startled her.

"It is for poor old Betsy," said Mr. Sutcliffe, who had followed her; "she died this morning."

Miss Thornton remembered the look on the old woman's face last evening, but she did not envy her now. Her whole mind was bent on recovering Thyrza; heaven would scarcely be heaven unless she were sure of "the child's" safety, she felt in her utter desolation and distress.

"Let us go to London by the next train," she said, and Mr. Sutcliffe agreed.

But it was a vain search. None of the cabmen remembered a "fare" such as was described to them, and she had not been to the hotel. Cousin Deborah spared no expense, and it was only when Mr. Sutcliffe assured her no more could be done, at least in this direction, that she consented to return to South Walford.

They took the mail train, and the next morning telegrams were sent to all the intermediate stations, but elicited nothing. She had evidently gone to London, and now all that could be done was to advertise in the papers, for further personal search was evidently useless.

"It's like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay, searching London for one young lady," said cook, solemnly, as she went to the back door to take the letters from the postman on the third day after Thyrza's flight.

"Any news?" asked the man, for all the village people were in a state of curiosity to know what had become of her.

"Not yet," said cook; but she took the letters herself to her mistress, in her eager desire to know if some tidings had come.

"Nothing," said Miss Thornton, shaking her head sadly, "nothing at all; I am at my wit's end."

"Prayers don't go for nothing, ma'am," said cook, trying to cheer up her mistress, "and there's no lack of them for her. Perhaps it's only a young girl's freak, after all. She'll come back, never fear."

But Miss Thornton was not hopeful, neither was Mr. Sutcliffe, neither were Mr. and Mrs. Gibson. They had one and all (with the exception of Cousin Deborah) a very bad opinion of Thyrza, and nothing would have surprised them concerning her except her return to Walford. But they were very quiet about it for Miss Thornton's sake. As far as was possible, the fact of her flight was kept secret. The

young Gibsons knew nothing of it, and even in the neighbourhood of the girl's home very few outside the circle of intimate friends knew that she had left of her own accord. They thought she had been sent to school at last, "and a very good thing too," they added, when they spoke of it.

But, as day by day and week by week passed without tidings, and the damp, cheerless autumn weather set in, poor Cousin Deborah grew sick with hope deferred, and had she been at all inclined to seek solace for her woes in giving written expression to them, she might have done so in similar fashion to that of the lines which some of us know, and feel to be too sadly true,—

"We too have autumns, when our leaves
Drop loosely through the darkened air;
When all our good seems bound in sheaves,
And we stand reaped and bare."

Once only did hope really wake up in her heart a few weeks after she had been left desolate, but it did not deceive her long. A letter came from London in a strange hand, and she opened it eagerly; but it was only from some relative of Mrs. Parker, to tell her that she had died the day before. There were no particulars, and Cousin Deborah could not feel

any grief, though she did wonder very much whether, as the end of life drew near, any glimmering of the real state of things had come to Mrs. Parker's mind, and made her sorry for the young life she had blighted. She had long been growing indifferent with respect to the treatment she had received, but yet this letter came like a blow upon a wound that, though healed, was still tender, and, softened by sorrow as her heart was, she shed a few tears, and wished she had never encouraged hard thoughts towards one who had passed beyond her reach to His judgment whose mercy is so far above ours. After this letter nothing happened to disturb the sad monotony of her life till Mrs. Gibson came in December for a fortnight.

And Thyrza,—what of her?

On that memorable day in September she arrived safely in London, but knowing well that Miss Thornton would leave no stone unturned in making search for her, she determined to baffle the seekers; and, with this view, summoned a cab which had on it the name of another large terminus at the other end of London. The man was waiting for a return "fare," and she told him to drive direct to his own station. There she got out, engaged a room, and left her luggage at the hotel close by,

and after taking lunch at a confectioner's, she made her way to the address of a governess-agent she had found in the day's *Times*, which she had bought at one of the stations on her way up. She had made up her mind that being a governess would be far preferable to living at home, and felt quite sure that she should get employment at once; but she found this a more difficult matter than she had anticipated, for she was thrown out at the first question, "Who will recommend you?"

Thyrza did not wish to let any one know of her whereabouts, so she left the office. The rain had been over some time, and a brilliant sun was shining, but the streets were dirty, and she was full of vexing thoughts. But they did not last long. Perhaps other agents might be less particular; so she referred to her list from the *Times*, and threaded her way through what seemed to her a perfect labyrinth of streets, till she reached the house she wanted. The agent was a slovenly-looking woman, and the office looked anything but inviting; yet even in this "hole," as Thyrza mentally termed it, she had a printed paper given her on which it stated that two referees were required. She felt it would never do to state, even here, how the case stood; so she left, to go by omnibus two

miles in another direction, for, in her ignorance of London, she had come a good way from the neighbourhood of the other addresses which she had with her. But after trying four more agents in succession, the result always being the same, the girl who hated conventionalities discovered that they were very necessary guards, and considered as such by all right-thinking people. So she returned to the hotel wiser than when she had left it.

She had engaged a room at the lowest possible price, and found herself at the very top of the high building, with a window overlooking houses, churches, and endless chimneys, all of one universal grey tint, and exceedingly dreary and dingy in the fading light. But she had some tea, and then went to bed, and while Cousin Deborah and Mr. Sutcliffe were being carried back to Walford after their vain search, she was sleeping off her fatigue and disappointment in a slumber unbroken by any reproachful dreams, and from which she did not awake till late the next morning.

A thought struck her as she was dressing. She would attend classes at some good school for a while (she had sufficient means), and that would help her to a recommendation. With this view she walked to a neighbourhood where

she knew there were many schools, and at last, after a deal of consideration, she fixed her mind on one not far from a little stationer's shop, in the window of which was a card announcing that there was a room to let.

Thyrza entered the shop, and began with confidence to arrange matters, never dreaming that a reference might be required even here. She looked older than she was, and was well dressed, so that the mistress of the shop—a very respectable elderly widow—took her to be a governess, and made the inquiry, as Thyrza said she should be out most of the day.

The question was unexpected, but Thyrza was not easily taken aback, and answered at once :

“ No, but I am going to attend classes at the college close by.”

“ Then I needn't ask for any further reference, miss,” said the shopwoman ; “ I know Miss Morris well, otherwise it would have been necessary ;” and she added that her last lodger but one was a lady who had given lessons in drawing at the college.

So matters were settled, and Thyrza went on to the school, where the autumn term had just commenced. There was a good deal of bustle in the house, for pupils were arriving, and the

principal had been hastily summoned away by telegram to a near relative who had been taken dangerously ill. The teacher left in charge asked perhaps fewer questions than Miss Morris would have done ; but even she wished for Miss Bryant's address, saying, as she took it, "Mrs. Barrett is a very respectable person," never doubting that her present lodger had been recommended to her from some reliable source.

"How tiresome people are !" thought Thyrza ; "every one is so impertinent, and makes such a fuss about references, and all that nonsense !" She did not know, nor did she care to know, though the last few hours had enlightened her considerably, that the proprieties and safeguards she rebelled against were protecting powers, without which the world would go sadly out of course. She felt very vexed indeed.

Her next business was to return to the hotel for her luggage, and as she paid what was owing there, another fact became clear to her, namely, that money had a way of slipping through one's fingers in London, after a fashion of which she had never dreamed. She would have to be very economical, she thought ; and as she seated herself again in a cab with her belongings, she silently made up her mind to walk

in future, until at least she had earned some money by teaching; and that time would not be far distant, she thought; for, of course, there would be nothing to hinder Miss Morris from recommending her after attending her school. But she recollected that at present she did not even know that lady, and that she had still her way to make. Of course she could make it—there was nothing to hinder her; and having by this time arrived at a very high pitch of self-estimation, she amused herself with trying to get glimpses of the gay shops in the streets through which the cab passed on its way to Mrs. Barrett's.

Her little room was upstairs at the back, and overlooked a narrow slip of garden still gay with geraniums and other late-blooming flowers. Opposite there were similar gardens and backs of houses, but beyond she could see the tops of trees in Hyde Park, and a somewhat dingy sky. It was a poor exchange for the freedom and pure country beauty of the view from the Cottage; but Thyrza did not think so; she was free—her own mistress—independent of the foolish fancies of a ridiculous old maid; she had been in subjection long enough, now she would be happy; and then she said to herself as she thought of what the day had brought forth, "It was a lucky

thing that I found the college and this lodging close together."

A lucky thing! was there nothing more?—nothing due to the prayers which all yesterday and to-day Cousin Deborah had been offering in anguish of mind, with an intensity of which Thyrza could form no idea? Such a thought never entered the mind of the wilful girl who had thrown off, at last, the show of allegiance to her best friend. Poor Miss Thornton was, after all, happier than she was; for though in complete ignorance as to what had become of her ungrateful darling, she took comfort as she committed her to the care of Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps, feeling sure that her prayer would be heard, and as surely answered, though in what way she might not know.

Thyrza could be both amiable and industrious when she chose, and the powers she had never cared to put forth to please the kind friend who had so lovingly watched over her, she now exerted to the utmost in order to win for herself a reputation for goodness and ability. She worked so hard in her different studies, and obeyed the college rules so particularly, that the masters held her up as a pattern to the rest; and she made herself so agreeable to the teachers, and asked so humbly to be

allowed to walk out with the school, as she was alone, that they were delighted to have her. At home she was so quiet and engrossed in her work, and so grateful for every little attention from Mrs. Barrett, that the good woman said of her what no one else had ever even thought—that “Miss Bryant was a very nice young lady indeed.”

So while Cousin Deborah was growing thinner than ever with anxiety and sickening suspense, as day after day and week after week passed and brought no tidings of Thyrza, she—obstinately shaking off all unpleasant thoughts which conscience would from time to time suggest—was living a life of routine in a spirit of contentment such as those who knew her best would have greatly marvelled at.

Christmas came, and one of the school-girls, taking pity on her friendless condition, invited her to her house. Thyrza went, not without sundry misgivings, as she rather dreaded inquiries of a personal nature. However, the holiday was short, and passed in such a round of gaiety that nothing unpleasant transpired. Indeed, she was so anxious to be thought agreeable, and dressed herself in her best, with so tasteful an arrangement of the ornaments which Cousin Deborah had given her, that she was a

good deal sought after, and the remarks upon her fine figure and stylish appearance, duly repeated to her in school-girl fashion, made her on better terms with herself than ever. Learning lessons was rather tiresome work, she felt, on the day of her return to Mrs. Barrett's.

But her money was dwindling away by this time, and she was growing very anxious to find employment that would pay her, and this was so strongly on her mind that she went to the college on the day of its re-opening, to ask Miss Morris to recommend her in case she should hear of a situation.

She found the house in some confusion, and going up to one of the girls, she inquired what was wrong.

"Oh, Miss Ward is not able to come back, I don't know why, but Miss Morris heard this morning, and it is very unfortunate just at the commencement of the term."

Thyrza found her way to the drawing-room, and to Miss Morris who was in it, and asked if she could be of any use ; saying she was anxious to meet with work, and if Miss Morris would try her for even a little while, she would do her best.

Miss Morris jumped at the proposal. She had watched Thyrza's steady application and

admired her conduct during the past term, and she said at once :

“Yes, I should be very glad ; if you are sure you can enforce obedience.”

Thyrza had no fears on that score. She had domineered over those around her all her life till she came here, and the prospect of making the girls obey her was exceedingly pleasant, so she assured Miss Morris that she felt equal to it. Terms, which were very satisfactory to Thyrza, were then agreed upon, and it was settled that she should begin her duties without delay. Just as she was going away Miss Morris said :

“I feel that a reference in your case is only a form ; still it would be as well to have one. Will you give me the address of one of your friends ?”

Thyrza knew it would injure her prospects to hesitate, so she answered at once,

“Oh, yes ; I——” but in the middle of her sentence some visitors were announced and she made her escape.

The newly-installed teacher thought that there was nothing like beginning at once to exercise authority ; so she soon had the hall cleared of boxes, ordered two little girls to go and practise directly, sent three more upstairs to unpack their things, and had organised a reading-

class with herself at the head in very quick time.

"Coming out in a new light, Thyrza?" remarked Sophy Chamberlaine, the girl at whose house she had just spent the holidays.

She received in reply a few words in German signifying that she would explain matters presently, which she did when the afternoon work was over and there was a little pause in the commotion.

"Then you are to take Miss Ward's place! that's fun! I never cared for her, but it strikes me you are doing it with a vengeance, if what I have just seen is a specimen."

"One must be determined; it is the only thing: besides, if one does not insist upon obedience at first it is more difficult to insure afterwards."

"One would think you had tried before."

"Teaching?"

"No, ruling; you seem quite at home at it."

Thyrza laughed, and said some people had the gift of command more than others.

"Yes; and then you are so tall; that always impresses children, I think. Now Miss Ward is very short, and she never kept very good order; a few inches make a great difference."

"Yes, it is rather an advantage," said Thyrza, complacently.

"Percy Graham said you had the finest figure that he had ever met with."

"Nonsense!"

"He did; it was the day after their party: don't you remember we strolled into the conservatory while you were with mamma?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, it was then he said it. I can tell you that you made an impression."

This was very gratifying, for Thyrza dearly loved to be admired; not that young Mr. Graham had struck her particularly, except as being a very good dancer. Yet, as she listened to Sophy's school-girlish gossip, she felt herself more important than ever; and though, in her office as mistress of the school-room in the absence of Miss Morris, she did not encourage any more such talk, she thought about it a good deal.

"I can't do this sum," said one of the younger pupils next day, when Thyrza had a class at her own command,— "I can't do this sum, Miss Bryant."

"Nonsense, my dear! you should never use the word 'can't' or 'cannot'; you can if you

will, that you may be quite sure. Where there's a will there's a way."

"Oh, I know a way," replied the child.

"Very well, then, make use of it."

"But it's a wrong way."

"That does not matter," was on the end of Thyrza's tongue, but she remembered that, however much she might advocate the carrying out of one's will at all hazards, it would scarcely do here, so she said,—

"Let me look at your sum. What was the way you said would be wrong?" she asked, after casting her eyes over the figures.

"I know there is the Key to the Arithmetic in that drawer; I meant I *could* look in it."

"Of course, but that would have been very wrong. Now I will help you."

"What is a soldier's first duty?" asked another little girl, who was writing some answers to questions on the Catechism.

"Obedience," was Thyrza's prompt reply.

"But do you suppose soldiers always like to obey?"

"Very probably not; but that has nothing to do with it: they must obey, and ask no questions."

"But why?" persisted the child.

"Because it is their duty."

"But what makes it their duty?"

"Oh dear, what a tiresome child!" thought Thyrsa, and she pretended not to hear. She was not to escape, however, for the question was repeated.

"What makes it their duty?"

"Why, in the first place, it is because they are commanded by some one in authority; and then, too, they have agreed to obey,—they must keep a promise, you know."

"'All that are set in authority,'" quoted the child. "Then I suppose it is our duty to obey, and ask no questions?"

"Undoubtedly it is."

"Then obedience comes first of all duties?"

"Yes, the very first; don't forget that," said Thyrsa, who had been the most disobedient child imaginable; but perhaps that made her all the more insist upon it, for she knew she had given a deal of trouble through the non-performance of that first duty, and trouble was what she particularly wished to escape.

Through the school-room door, left open for one moment, came the sound of a "galop," played with some spirit in a room adjoining. Here was another opportunity for showing she was mistress,—she would make the most of it.

"Who is that practising in the dining-room?" she asked of a girl who had just entered.

"Lisa Davis."

"Tell her to come here, please."

So the culprit came, feeling very guilty indeed.

"Is that gallop what you have to practise for your music-master?" asked Miss Bryant, as if her whole and sole object was to see every one's duty performed to perfection.

"No," faltered Lisa.

"Then why were you playing it?"

There was no answer.

"I insist upon a reply to my question, Lisa. I repeat, why were you playing it?"

"I heard it once in the holidays, and papa gave it to me, and I wished to see if I could play it."

"I suppose you are aware it is against the rules?"

"Yes ; I am very sorry."

"Very well, then, I will not say any more about it, but if the offence is repeated I must send you to practise out of school hours. It will never do to waste time in this way ; it is neither just to your master nor to yourself. But I will look over it to-day, as it is the first time," said Thyrza, with great magnanimity.

And Lisa, almost in tears, returned to the dining-room, where she practised studies and her latest piece for the rest of her time.

"The drawers are in a most untidy state," said Thyrza, the next morning at breakfast; "I have been looking round, and, with one or two exceptions, they are disgraceful. There ought to be fines for such disorder,—did not Miss Ward impose any?"

"Not often."

"But it is one of the rules?"

"Oh yes," said several, "it is one of the rules."

"I shall begin with fines from this morning," said Thyrza; "I cannot allow such untidiness to go unchecked. And, Flora, my dear, I found a novel in your drawer; does Miss Morris allow you to read such books?"

"The books we read have all to be shown to Miss Morris," answered the girl, evasively.

"And has this been shown?"

"No."

"Then you must give it up to me, and I will ask her about it. Go and fetch it now."

Flora obeyed, unwillingly enough, but she saw no help for it. When she placed the book in Thyrza's hands she could not tell that it was the very same which Miss Bryant herself had

read surreptitiously some time ago, in direct opposition to her aunt's wishes. Thyrza remembered it well, but the thought did not disturb her ; all she was bent upon now was the making herself valuable to Miss Morris. She determined to put off the giving a reference as long as possible, and as soon as she could feel secure in her post to write herself to Miss Thornton, so that there might be no hindrance to the success she wished for. Meanwhile she went on as she had begun, ruling the school-room with a sway to which Miss Ward's was nothing,—so the girls thought when they compared the two teachers. No excuse was received, no allowance made for anything ; insubordination was quelled as soon as it rose, and quietness and order reigned, such as fully to satisfy Miss Morris, and make her consider her new teacher a decided acquisition.

CHAPTER VII.

FEBRUARY had come, and one morning Cousin Deborah stood at the dining-room window looking out upon the lawn, but listening intently to any sound from the back of the house which might tell of the arrival of the postman. She was always hoping for news, yet fearing it, and this hour was, perhaps, to her the most trying of all the day.

She had grown very old-looking of late. Sorrow and suspense were doing their work silently, and there was a look upon the thin face, a drawing down of the corners of the mouth, and a droop of the eyelids, which told of a sad heart. Some people in her case would have been ill, excitement would have ended in fever, or grief dwindled into decline. But this was not how troubles affected her. They seemed to sink into her very self,

and the only outward sign of them was a drooping, a constant feeling of being weary, and, perhaps most visible sign of all, thinner and greyer hair.

She was strongly tempted to be indifferent about all else beside Thyrza ; life seemed a great burden of which she felt tired ; but for "the child's" own sake she strove to keep up ; made herself eat when she had no appetite, and took long walks when her own feeling prompted her to shrink from meeting any one and to shut herself up in the house. It was this which made her as constant as ever in visiting the poor people, and which, it may be, opened her heart yet more than formerly in sympathy with the woes which they poured into her ear.

This, too, made her encourage little May when she came every morning to the Cottage on a ministry of her own to Miss Thornton. Winter mosses and lichens, the pink berries of the spindle-tree, or some delicately-veined ivy leaves were brought in from time to time by her little loving hands, and from forbearing to forbid her, the desolate heart had begun to take pleasure in the devotion which was not Thyrza's, but which seemed natural to every one but to her.

Thus bearing her sorrow, it had a softening influence on her. In her early life hard thoughts

of God had been in her heart, but they were gone now ; had, indeed, been gone some time. He had been very good to her, she would say to herself, and she would trust Him now when the darkest hour of her life had come to her. She owned she had been wilful, and she would bear her punishment ; but sometimes when she felt May's little clinging arms about her and remembered that Thyrza had never in all her life given her an embrace, it was difficult not to reject her because she was not her own adopted darling, difficult to suffer the fondling which contrasted so strongly with Thyrza's indifference. But she resisted the feeling ; the love she had hungered for was not given her, but she need not on that account refuse that which came in her way ; so she took May in her arms and admired her flowers, till the child could not be prevented from coming every morning to see how her dear Miss Thornton was, and if some of the leaves were not growing brown and withered. The first early snowdrops in the glass on her little table, May had brought from the rectory yesterday. They grew in the shrubbery, and had, by degrees, spread over a great part of the churchyard, sprinkling the low green mounds with their pure blossoms, and bearing to many a heart a message of hope and peace.

There were snowdrops and one or two early crocuses just showing above the dark mould of the flower borders this morning as Cousin Deborah looked out. It had been a stormy night, just such another as that on which, fifteen years ago, Thyrza's father had died. It had been impossible not to think of that time as she lay awake listening to the wind and the rain, and the thought came to her again now as she looked out upon the lawn and paths strewn with broken branches, but upon which the wintry sun was shining calmly, as if to whisper hope to her desolate heart.

Would the postman never come? It was growing late, but he could not have passed; there was always the newspaper, and he might have been delayed; she would wait still a little longer. A few minutes more, and the sharp click which gave notice of the lifting of the latch of the back door almost startled her, though it was the sound she was listening for. Had not her attention been strained to that one point she would probably not have heard it, but to-day it required a strong effort to keep her from going to the door herself. She made the effort, for she felt it was right to keep herself as quiet and calm as possible; and her pale face wore a look of sad endurance when cook opened

the dining-room door and came in with the letters.

Then her face changed. It was Jane's place to bring in what the postman had brought, not cook's; though on special occasions the old servant felt herself privileged, and knowing this, Miss Thornton's face altered when she saw her in the doorway, and she said eagerly: "Is there a letter?"

"One from Miss Thyrza herself, ma'am, or I'm greatly mistaken;" and cook stood still when she had given her mistress the letter.

Yes, it was Thyrza's writing, Miss Thornton saw that at once. So many mornings had she watched for this, so often had she prayed for tidings of the girl she so tenderly loved, that now, when at last her longing was satisfied, she trembled greatly: what would the envelope reveal?

Cook stood there still, waiting eagerly, and Miss Thornton did not tell her to go.

Was there a mist before her eyes? the letter seemed so difficult to read. But it was only the beating of her heart which was so loud and so confusing; she could not read the words for a minute or two, and cook silently withdrew, feeling that such sorrow was sacred. This was the letter:—

*"Fielden Hill College, London, W.,
February 5.*

"DEAR AUNT DEBORAH,

"I have been wishing to write to you for some time, but felt I would rather be in an independent position before doing so. I came here as an occasional pupil in September, and am now one of the teachers, and getting on very well indeed. Miss Morris (the Principal of the College) will, very likely, soon write to you about me, though she said she did not require a reference, only as a form. I am quite well and happy, but too busy to write more. With my love, I remain, dear aunt, your affectionate

"THYRZA BRYANT."

Thyrza had thought this letter a great achievement, and an unfailing argument in her favour, for was she not scrupulously affectionate in her terms? She would have been slightly astonished could she have seen how it was received.

Miss Thornton read it again and again; its utter absence of consideration for her striking her painfully, unselfish as she was. And this was the girl she had been praying and waiting for, spending anxious days and sleepless nights on her account, growing grey and old with care

for her ! not a word of inquiry as to her well-being, not a word of regret for causing such sorrow, ignoring the fact of her devoted affection altogether ! Cousin Deborah rang the bell, and cook re-appeared. She held her tears in check as she said to her, " Miss Thyrza is quite safe and well, cook."

" Well, thank God for that, ma'am. May I ask where she is ? "

" In London ; she is governess in a school. That is all she tells me, except that she is well and happy."

" Then may God forgive her for being happy ! for it passes my comprehension how she can be so," said the old servant.

Miss Thornton was shedding quiet tears. It was such a disappointment to have a letter like this, and the reaction after the terrible suspense could not but be felt. Cook, in her indignation at seeing her beloved mistress so broken down, could have wreaked summary vengeance on Thyrza's head. She stood still for a few minutes, and then ventured her little word of consolation.

" Don't take on, ma'am, if you can help it ; them as does wrong must suffer for it in time, and please God she'll be brought to a better mind some day. Things look bright for her at

present (for she only thinks of herself), but they won't last; a time will come when she'll long for nothing so much as her auntie's shoulder to rest her head upon, and some of the petting she threw on one side when she had it in plenty. Take heart, ma'am, she's safe and well, and that's a blessing; and the Lord has heard your prayers for her, so you'll keep up and trust Him still; there's nothing too hard for Him. Don't fret! now don't!"

But cook was crying herself, and every one in the house cried when the news was known; and it was only after the first burst of feeling was over that they fully realized the comfort which the news of Thyrza's safety brought.

Meanwhile little May had come in by way of the laurel gate, and was holding back her frock as she bent forward over the wet border to look in at the dining-room window. She had brought two pink hepaticas this morning, she had found them in a sheltered part of the garden, and with a sprig of shining box for a background, she had felt sure she was bringing a treasure. But as she saw Miss Thornton with her head hidden in her hands bending over the table, she took fright and ran back again to the rectory as fast as she could, rushing into the room where her mother was preparing her morn-

ing's work, crying out, "Oh, mamma, mamma, I looked in at the window, and Miss Thornton was crying so dreadfully, you don't think Thyrza is dead, do you?"

Mrs. Sutcliffe did not know what to think. She sent May upstairs for a warm shawl, and throwing it over her head, prepared to go out.

"Mayn't I go too, mamma?"

"Not yet, I think, darling,—presently, perhaps."

May was not very sorry to be hindered. It was so extraordinary a thing to see a grown-up person in tears, she was rather frightened.

"Then will you take my flowers, mamma?" she asked.

"No; keep them, dear. By-and-by, no doubt, Miss Thornton will like to have them, and then you shall take them. Good-bye, my darling."

She stooped down to kiss her, feeling a sudden terror of what might have happened to Thyrza, and holding her own treasure all the closer for the thought.

"But you are not going for long, mamma, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"Only because you said 'Good-bye.' We

never say it when we go such a short way as it is to the Cottage."

"Perhaps Miss Thornton may want me ; if so, I shall not be home again just yet, and you may be in school. Shut the door after me quickly, it is so cold for you in the draught."

So May ran upstairs to spread a good deal of consternation in the school-room, while her mother walked on to the cottage. Mr. Sutcliffe was from home, and his wife trembled at the thought of what there might be to do. Still she could, and would, if necessary, go with Miss Thornton wherever she desired, if the distance were within possible reach ; but for all that, she wished her husband had been at home.

Miss Thornton was sitting where May had seen her, and Mrs. Sutcliffe went up to her and knelt down, to bring herself on a level with the bowed head.

"What is it, Deborah ?" she asked, with her arm round her.

Miss Thornton gave her Thyrza's note, and Mrs. Sutcliffe read it in silence. At first she was too indignant to speak, then far too sorry ; she only held her old friend close to her, as she might have held one of her own children, though Miss Thornton was older than she was, and not in the habit of claiming sympathy.

But she looked so tiny, so thin and worn, that Mrs. Sutcliffe felt quite motherly towards her as she listened to the pitiful sound of smothered sobs.

"Don't cry so, dear," she said, presently ; "Thyrza is safe, and that is more than we had dared to expect ; and she is willing you should know where she is, so that is good," added Mrs. Sutcliffe, feeling all the while so angry with the girl that she had to exercise strong self-control to keep herself from saying all she thought of her.

"But to send me such a letter !" said Miss Thornton at last ; "it is so very, very cold."

"Ice could not be colder, but perhaps it hides a good deal ; Thyrza is not one to open her heart. But think of the comfort of knowing she is safe and in good hands ; we must be very thankful."

"Yes," said Miss Thornton, "I am very thankful,—very ; only—I know it is weak of me, but I do feel so worn out with waiting, I think I must go to bed ;" and she rose feebly as she spoke.

Mrs. Sutcliffe did not oppose her ; she knew how terrible had been the strain upon all her powers, and perhaps to lie quiet in her own room would do her more good than anything ;

so she went with her and undressed her. Then as the tired head was laid upon the pillow she said,—

“Can I do anything for you? Shall I write to Thyrza?”

“No, no.”

“To Mr. Gibson, then?”

“Yes, write to him; perhaps he could come for a day or two,—and Ellen. I should like them to be here. Good-bye, dear, and thank you.”

It was said with such a touching meekness, that Mrs. Sutcliffe felt the hot tears rush to her eyes as she bent down to kiss the worn cheek. She turned as she was leaving the room, and noticed that the eyelids were closed. Something—an unacknowledged fear—made her for a moment feel faint with apprehension, and she went back to the bed. Then Cousin Deborah opened her eyes.

“Don’t wait, dear,” she said; “perhaps I shall sleep.”

So Mrs. Sutcliffe left her.

“It will be the death of her, ma’am, that I’m sure,” said cook, whom the rector’s wife had summoned to tell her about Miss Thornton. “I’ve never known her to give up in this way before, and I’ve lived with her four-and-twenty years; it’s not like her to do it.”

"No, I know it is not like her ; but then we must remember how terribly anxious she has been, and how little sleep she has had. Perhaps if she can rest thoroughly to-day, she may be better to-morrow. I am going to write to ask if Mr. and Mrs. Gibson can come for a few days ; if so, they may do her good."

"It's heartbreakin'," said cook, not remarking on the announcement, the truth being that she was inclined to be jealous of any one in the matter of taking care of Miss Thornton ; "it's heartbreakin', and nothing short of it. Folks do die of broken hearts, though they call it by other names mostly. Well, if Miss Thyrza kills my dear missis, I won't forgive her in a hurry, that I know."

Mrs. Sutcliffe's heart went with cook's. "But still," she said, as if it pained her (as it did) to hear the utterance of her own feeling, "we must not be hard upon her ; we have a good example in that room upstairs."

"She's too good to live, and that's the fact of it," said cook. "She bears it a great deal too well to be natural ; I'd give something to hear her say a sharp word now and then."

"No, don't say that ; we should not like her to be different ; only, if she bears it so well, we must too,—only——well, after all, it is a great

deal harder to see her suffer in that way than if she made a fuss about it ; and I am as angry with Miss Thyrsa as ever you can be, cook,—*very* angry I am ; more angry than I can say."

Cook brightened up a little at this. It was her way to speak her own mind, and she liked other people to do the same.

"And perhaps," said Mrs. Sutcliffe, "comfort may come after a while. It is a great blessing to know of her safety. And she cannot really escape trouble,—it comes to us all ; and perhaps when it comes to her, it may soften her heart."

"It'll take a precious deal to do that," said cook, shaking her head wisely. "Well, for my part, she's welcome to all she gets, for she can't well have more than she deserves."

Mrs. Sutcliffe felt it would be useless to say more, and she went home. But May's hepaticas, though she daily changed the water they were in, turned brown and withered before she saw Miss Thornton again.

About a week after Thyrsa had sent her letter, Miss Morris, meeting her as she came downstairs, said kindly, "Oh, Miss Bryant, I have never had the address you promised me. We have been so busy that I have only thought of it when you were not by. Thank you, that is all I want."

Thyrza was feeling more uneasy than she had ever felt since leaving home. No answer had come to her letter to Miss Thornton, and she was beginning to fear that, after all, instead of doing her good, her guardian might injure her prospects materially by disclosing the manner in which she had left her protection, though when she had written she had felt such faith in her affection (which, despise as she might, she owned was very great), that she had trusted to it to say only what was to her credit. It was difficult to keep order in the school-room this morning (or rather would have been, had not she fully established her authority there), for her mind was occupied with forebodings of what might be in store for her ; and when Miss Morris asked her if she would kindly take one of her classes for her, as she had an appointment to keep, the smile with which she signified assent was a forced one, though no one noticed it. In the middle of her added task a maid came in and asked for Miss Bryant.

“ Who is it ? ” asked Thyrza.

“ A clergyman, miss ; he said he need not send in his name.”

Thyrza felt strongly inclined to refuse to see him, for she guessed who it was, but she remembered it was wise to keep the surface of affairs

smooth at all events, so she only demurred on the ground of not being able to leave her class.

"Ask him if he can wait," she said, torn between her desire to keep straight with Miss Morris, by fulfilling the duty left to her, and her fear lest that lady should come in before she had finished. The maid came back to say the gentleman would wait; and after a quarter of an hour's prolonged torture, which no one guessed, Thyrza was free.

She gave her orders quite calmly for the next lesson, and then went to the drawing-room. Her heart was throbbing with a great fear as she entered and saw standing by the fire, looking very grave and very stern, the object of her strong aversion—Mr. Gibson.

Thyrza rallied her forces, and went up to him with an unconcerned manner, holding out her hand as if it was a matter of course that they should meet on friendly terms.

Mr. Gibson shook hands (rather against the grain, it must be confessed), and then said at once, "I am come from Walford; Miss Thornton is very ill."

"Is she? What is the matter?"

"Thyrza! can you ask?" said Mr. Gibson, very gravely; "can you ask, after the treatment she has received from you?"

"I didn't think she would care much. All the servants hated me, and she seemed to think I was something very dreadful, so I don't see why she should trouble."

The tone of this was calculated to annoy Mr. Gibson, and he said, "Pray, do you think you owe no duty nor obedience to my cousin?"

"She never tried to enforce any till the last day, when I thought it was rather too late to begin."

"But surely the love, the devotion she showed you might have aroused a feeling of gratitude which would lead you to respect her wishes."

"I am not sentimental," said Thyrza, as if that ought to settle everything; "besides, I do not consider myself under any obligation. I never asked her to take me. She need not have adopted me unless she had wished it. I should say the advantage was quite as much on her side as mine. Disinterested kindness is a rare thing, and no doubt some benefit was expected by her when she took me."

The precocious style of this argument was almost more than Mr. Gibson could stand; but he managed to say,—“And pray, what benefit do you suppose it would be to any one to adopt a little ungrateful child?”

"Oh, of course cases differ ; but Aunt Deborah is one who must have some object for her affection, so that I satisfied her need in that respect. And then there might be other advantages."

"Have you any idea about your own family, Thyrsa ?"

"None whatever. I have read very wonderful stories of people who have brought up children of exiles or of noble family, but poor and in trouble, and then coming into great riches when the foster-child received his inheritance. I may be one of these. I may be a princess in disguise for anything I know to the contrary."

She said it as if she thought such a thing was very probable, and Mr. Gibson, though he would gladly have spared her, felt that it was time to check her extravagant notions. He moved to the window and said, "Come here, Thyrsa."

She obeyed.

"Do you see those men who are making the sewer in the road ?"

"Yes : they are a rough set."

"Thyrsa, theirs is the rank from which you come. So far from being a princess in disguise, let me tell you that your own father was just such a man as the one you see there with the pickaxe in his hand."

It was a great blow ; so great that Thyrsa could with difficulty rally from it. She stood for a few minutes contemplating the men at the sewer with a strange sort of fascination, and then she said bitterly, "That is the reason why the Walford servants were never civil to me. No doubt they had been told."

"Thyrza, no one knows of it at Walford, I am sure ; and very few anywhere besides your aunt Deborah, Mrs. Gibson, and myself are aware of the fact. We have been most careful to conceal it ; for though a man of that grade may be as honourable and worthy as any in a higher position, yet the world is severe, and we would not injure you by stating what might in some minds cause a prejudice against you. It is very easy to account for the want of politeness you complain of. Any person—whether a countess or a maid-of-all-work—can command civility by being in the first place civil herself."

Thyrza said nothing, and Mr. Gibson continued, "But now about your leaving home as you did ; it was very wrong."

"I don't see that. Many girls of my age have been obliged to go out as governesses ; some even younger. I wished to be independent."

"But those girls you speak of have been compelled by necessity to earn their own living. It

can never be anything but a very painful ordeal for a girl to face the world so young,—I mean a right-thinking girl. I would exert every power to the utmost to save my daughters from such a trial. Where it is of necessity, the case is very different ; but there are few things more alarming than to see a girl throw off restraint and assert her independence. I assure you, Thyrza, it is a very dreadful thing."

Thyrza did not seem to think so. She only said, "I have done very well."

"Yes, thank God. But, Thyrza, you have no right to look for protection unless you are in the way of duty, and I cannot call your conduct dutiful. Do," he added more gently, "do, my dear girl, think of these things, and pray for a humble spirit."

There was silence for a few moments, and then Thyrza said, "Aunt Deborah need not trouble about me ; I am getting on all right. Tell her that, and perhaps it will ease her mind."

"And have you no other message ?"

"No, I think that is all. At least, I should like it if she would write to me now and then."

Thyrza thought this would look well and stop inquiries ; otherwise, she did not care to have the letters she asked for. Mr. Gibson thought

the wish a hopeful sign, and soon after went away.

He came again the following day when the girls were walking, and asked to see Miss Morris. She knew he had been to see Miss Bryant the day before, and was glad of the opportunity to inquire about her ; but Mr. Gibson questioned her first.

"How are you satisfied with Miss Bryant?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"Perfectly. Her discipline is excellent : it is wonderful how she manages even the most tiresome pupils ; and yet she told me she was under twenty. It is a fact sometimes difficult to believe, for she is quite different from other teachers I have had. They are generally shy, and go only half way in their work. Now Miss Bryant makes no allowance : what she orders she will have done. It is a great help to me."

Mr. Gibson thought of the wilful girl at Walford, and was not surprised. He knew that those who like best to rule are generally those who themselves refuse to submit.

"But," he said, feeling it was a rather hard thing to do, "the lady who brought up Miss Bryant, my cousin, Miss Thornton, of South Walford, wishes me to tell you that until last week she did not know of Miss Bryant's

whereabouts. She left home last September, without leave."

Miss Morris was much shocked.

"I had no idea of it," she said.

"No; and we feel you ought to know, if only for the sake of the pupils under your care. The question is, whether it is safe for them to associate with one so wilful."

"So far as I can see, her authority is now entirely on the side of right; insubordination is evidently the greatest offence to her, and she appears only to carry out my views. But indeed you shock me very much."

Miss Morris recalled the circumstances under which Thyrsa had first come as pupil, and remarked that she had behaved with great propriety during that time, and was a favourite with the masters she had learnt of, because of her industry and steadiness.

Mr. Gibson said he thought her anxiety to be independent would keep her from acting wrongly, but he feared that principle was wanting.

The two discussed the matter for some time, and Miss Morris did as the gardener had done with the unpromising apple tree,—she gave Thyrsa "a chance."

"I will be exceedingly watchful," she said,

kindly, "and will let Miss Thornton know from time to time how she goes on ; you may trust me to be her friend, and perhaps a better spirit may come to her in time."

Mr. Gibson, who felt no one could have blamed Miss Morris if she had dismissed Thyrza at once, was very grateful for her forbearance, and left with a lighter heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a proof of their belief in her possession of a brave heart, that no one attempted to "rouse" Miss Thornton in the sad days immediately following the arrival of Thyrza's letter.

The rousing process, which unsympathising people deem a panacea for all ills, would have done no good, for it was not the stupor of despair into which Cousin Deborah had sunk, but merely the physical exhaustion consequent on the loosened tension of her mind so long strained to one point.

Even cook, who had a horror of "folks giving away," as she termed it, made no effort to bring her mistress back to the world, from which, for a time, she seemed to have withdrawn; and the doctor whom Mrs. Gibson had summoned said rest was the best thing for her, and that her spirit had too much spring in it not to rebound when rest had done its work.

So no one troubled her. Mrs. Gibson sat in her room generally, but not always; indeed, when Cousin Deborah did express a wish, it was to be alone and in the dark.

But every one was very glad when, after five long days, she asked that the blinds might be drawn up a little.

The next day it was better still, for she thought perhaps she would come downstairs presently, and inquired for Mr. Gibson.

She said she was glad he was gone to see Thyrza, though she made no further remark upon it; but when he returned from London he found her on the sofa in the drawing-room, looking pale certainly, but rested, and ready to hear what he had to say.

"She is a dear, good woman," she said, when Mr. Gibson told her of what Miss Morris had promised. "What is there I can do for her? Can you find out for me, John?"

Mr. Gibson said he would see. He did not tell her how cold Thyrza had been, but there was no need, for Cousin Deborah knew quite well that he would have treasured up the smallest sign of love to comfort her with, and she understood what his silence meant.

"I shall write every week," she said to Mrs. Gibson afterwards; "if I am to win her back I

must try to keep up the homelike feeling, and we shall have her here again when the holidays come."

Mrs. Gibson was very doubtful on this last point, but she would not check the hope which was springing in her cousin's heart, and allowed that letters might do a deal of good; but she thought in her own mind that Thyrza would not care to have them so often.

"But I cannot come to Lowton at present," Miss Thornton said to Mrs. Gibson, who had been trying to persuade her to do so. "I shall be stronger by-and-by when I have been out a little, and it is better to get used to things as soon as possible. We might have the pony this afternoon, Ellen, and drive to the Mill cottages; there is a child ill there, Mr. Sutcliffe tells me, and we may do something for it."

Cousin Deborah had long ago accepted, as a fact of her life, that she was not to be ministered unto, but to minister. It had been hard at one time to acquiesce in this, but had grown easier as her spirit had gradually blended itself more and more with His, whose divine example of self-sacrifice she strove, though imperfectly, to imitate. What He had chosen for Himself it was not for her to reject as her own lot; was it not enough, and more than enough, to be

able, in some faint degree, to follow in His sacred footsteps ?

Then, too, there was much love around her, to which, perhaps, she had been somewhat indifferent in the days when she had devoted herself so exclusively to Thyrsa.

She would not shut up her heart in cold reserve because the one thing she had built her hopes upon had been found wanting.

"I have been self-willed all my life, and I am going to be self-willed still," she said to Mrs. Gibson, with one of her old sniles, on the day when her cousins were to leave her. "I cannot come to you now, but I will presently, if possible; and, meanwhile, tell John I trust to him to find out in what way I may benefit that good Miss Morris. Remember, anything I can do for her I shall only be too thankful to do."

Mrs. Gibson remembered Cousin Deborah's eager anxiety to assure herself that she was out of Mrs. Parker's debt, and felt the contrast in this case. It was in no spirit of proud independence that she had given her commission to her cousin; there was no measuring or weighing here: she owed a debt of gratitude to the kind woman who had not turned Thyrsa away when she found out what she was; and though she could never repay it, she would do her utmost.

Mr. Gibson knew what she meant, and found out, through some means or other, that Miss Morris had a nephew bent upon entering the Church, but too poor for there to be any hope of going through college.

It was the very thing! To make glad his heart would assuredly be a comfort to all belonging to him, and Mr. Gibson was instructed to bring about this happy result.

Miss Morris was rather overwhelmed at first, and a little uncomfortable. She was a good woman, and one apt to weigh her motives, and she was aware that if Thyrza had been less valuable to her she might have acted differently by her. Though she knew she would never have turned her away without giving her some opportunity of recovering herself.

But the liberality of Miss Thornton's offer seemed so much beyond the benefit she was able to confer ; and at first she forgot how Thyrza was upon her mind, and how watchful she had felt obliged to be since knowing the kind of girl she had in her school-room. But she was too honourable a woman to take what, at first, seemed almost like a bribe, and she told Mr. Gibson she could not possibly answer for Thyrza's future. If she failed in her duty she could not retain her in the same post ; though she

would do her best for her, and she said a great deal more to the same effect, which Mr. Gibson duly reported to his cousin, and which brought this note to Miss Morris in reply :

“ If I could thank you for your kindness to my adopted child, I would ; but that is quite beyond me. To make glad your heart as you have made glad mine I can scarcely do, therefore do not deny me the little that is in my power. In keeping my darling when you might have justly refused, you may have helped to ‘ save a soul from death ;’ therefore, next to my heavenly Father, I owe you thanks :—my best are inadequate, but such as they are do not refuse them ; and remember that I hold you as free as ever to act according to your judgment concerning her.”

So Miss Morris could do nothing less than accept what was offered.

Thyrza was an anxiety to her, more from the knowledge of her latent qualities than from any which she showed. For, unconscious of the strict though kindly watch kept on her conduct, she continued to fulfil her duties in a very satisfactory manner. She was exacting sometimes, for power was too precious a thing to have in her hands for her—young as she was—to be always wise in the exercise of it. But she never

went far beyond the mark. Certainly, she did not succeed in winning her pupils' affection, but that did not trouble her ; Sophy Chamberlaine was her friend, and she did not seek any other ; as to Miss Morris, she looked upon her only in the light of a possible stepping-stone to a more congenial sphere, and nothing else ; but then she was forced sometimes to own to herself that that was a great deal.

Cousin Deborah struggled bravely against the feeling of sadness which belongs inseparably to the lengthening evenings of spring, and which this year made persistent efforts to take hold of her ; but when summer had fairly set in, and the lilac blossoms and pink thorn had turned to dingy brown, while the roses were making up by their loveliness for the loss of any beauty faded before theirs, and the garden at the Cottage was one sweet bewildering idea of perfume and bright tints, she recovered her spirits wonderfully. The holidays were drawing near, and then Thyrsa would come home.

But Thyrsa did not come. In fact, nothing was farther from her intention. She accepted instead an invitation to go with the Chamberlaines to Scotland, which, considering all the life and fun they met with, was far more to her mind than seven long weeks at Walford.

Neither did she go home at Christmas. Miss Thornton would not press her against her inclination, and as she wished to remain at the school, and Miss Morris also remained, there was nothing really to object to in this arrangement except the sinking of heart which it brought to Cousin Deborah, and which, after all, was nothing fresh ; only it is a feeling to which long habit scarcely accustoms one.

It went on like this for many holidays ; either Thyrza spent them at Mrs. Chamberlaine's, or took a temporary engagement with pupils, or stayed with Miss Morris, often to that good lady's discomfort ; for although nothing could be really found fault with in Thyrza's conduct, she was a great anxiety ; and yet, deputy guardian as she was, she could not leave her to herself, so that when Thyrza stayed at the college she was obliged to stay too, and it was sometimes, to say the least of it, a great tie.

"After all, teaching in a school is very slow work," said Thyrza one day to herself when she had been at the college three years. "I think I may as well try my wings and soar a little higher." So she went into Miss Morris's little room to communicate in more studied terms her intentions.

"And have you thought of anything ? have you any definite ideas ?" asked Miss Morris.

"I saw an advertisement in the *Times* this morning, which looks rather promising, but I thought I would speak to you first before taking any steps."

"Quite right. Yes, it looks promising, as you say, but would not you be wanted at once?"

"I imagine so."

"That would be rather awkward for me," said Miss Morris; "good teachers are not to be met with always just when one wants them. However, my dear, I should be sorry to hinder you, so if you like to call on the lady this afternoon you can; I shall be happy to do what I can for you."

Thyrza thanked her somewhat absently; she thought Miss Morris's tone a little patronising, and of course resented it. But she did not allow it to disturb her, and an hour or two afterwards presented herself before Mrs. Witherne as candidate for the post of governess to her three children.

Everything looked plain and smooth sailing, only she found that she would not be wanted at least for six weeks, which was not exactly to her mind; for with the prospect of more liberty she felt that school work would be very tame. But she made the best of it, and a few days saw the negotiations completed, and

Thyrza felt she had behaved well to some purpose.

"I should like a little talk with you, my dear," said Miss Morris, on the evening before Thyrza left her ; "can you come to my room during the evening?"

"Yes," said Thyrza, scenting advice in the air, and not approving of it.

However, she went to the small room where Miss Morris was accustomed to sit when not hard at work in the school-room with pupils, or at harder work still in the drawing-room with their relatives and friends. She was not exactly resting now, but that was nothing, she scarcely knew what rest meant ; and she had only snatched an hour from her books and letters because she felt it would be right to say a little to Thyrza.

"We shall miss you very much," she said kindly, and speaking perfect truth ; but she could not add that she was personally sorry, for she had not grown fonder of Thyrza lately.

It was pleasant to feel she had made herself of value, and Thyrza took the speech as only her due, for she had done her very best, though with no very high motive ; but she did not think much of motives.

"It will seem very strange at first," she

remarked, "so much quieter ; different in every way."

There was a very long full stop. Miss Morris wished to give advice, and Thyrza was not exactly the person to whom it was easy to give it. But the lady of middle age felt it was absurd to be shy of speaking to a girl of twenty, so she began :

"I wanted to say something to you about Miss Thornton. Do you not think it would be right to go and see her as soon as you have an opportunity ? it is so long since you were at home."

Thyrza sat perfectly still ; her thick lips were set in a very decided pout, and her eyes flashed from beneath her black eyebrows, indignant at what she was pleased to consider impertinence. She was quite in ignorance of that call which Mr. Gibson had made so long ago, and of his revelation to Miss Morris ; neither did she know that she and Miss Thornton exchanged letters from time to time. All that vexed her was that Miss Morris, whom she had served so well, should presume to dictate to her ; and so she sat as perfectly still as if no speech had been made which it would be right for her to answer.

"You have not been home once since you

came here, I think," said Miss Morris, Thyrsa's reception of her first remark having the effect of rendering this stiffer than it had been, and feeling herself at a loss how to go on.

"I have not been home," said Thyrsa, "nor do I wish to go ; neither am I wanted. You do not know Miss Thornton, or you would scarcely suggest such a thing. She and I never agreed well, there was no sympathy between us, and I am not aware that there is likely to be any more now than there was when I left her, more than three and a half years ago. No possible good would come of a visit to her."

"But it might be a comfort to her," suggested Miss Morris.

Thyrsa's lip curled scornfully, but this was all her reply.

"You told me once that she was your guardian and had brought you up ; don't you think you owe her a duty ?" ventured Miss Morris.

"I believe that question, if it is a question, lies between Miss Thornton and me," said Thyrsa, who having secured from Miss Morris the recommendation she had all along had in view in serving her, was less careful now than she might have been two months ago, and spoke in a tone not quite consistent with their respective positions and age. But Miss Morris

wished to be forbearing, and she did not resent her reply.

"I can only say, my dear, that if I were in Miss Thornton's place I should be very eager to see you after so long a separation ; and perhaps you might find the differences had diminished considerably during the time. Would it not be worth while to try ?"

"I do not think so. We were not made for each other. I am sure *I* am a great deal happier away from her than I was before. Most likely she feels the same."

"Then does she express no wish to see you ?"

"Oh, she has wished it so often that I am tired ; but then I must tell you she is the weakest woman I ever saw ; vain wishing is quite in her line."

Thus the girl, selfish and wilful, sat in judgment on the well-disciplined, chastened woman ; thus, with all the conceit of her youth, she looked down upon a nature which her own was too narrow to appreciate. Miss Morris felt roused to remonstrate.

"If she were your mother you would scarcely speak of her in this manner," she said ; "and she stands in the place of a mother to you. Surely you should have more respect for her."

"Oh, I could never respect any one so little as she is," said Thyrza; "she is not up to my shoulder; respect is out of the question."

"Then you judge only by externals?" said Miss Morris, in spite of herself betrayed into a smile; "do you measure all people by their height?"

"I think it goes a very great way: one seldom meets with a strong will and a powerful character in a little body," said Thyrza.

"Napoleon and Alexander the Great, for instance," said Miss Morris, drily.

"Oh, of course there are exceptions to every rule."

"I cannot agree with you as to the rule in this case, because I have seen little people very determined as well as tall ones; not that I have ever given the subject such deep consideration as you have evidently bestowed upon it. But it certainly is hard upon us less favoured mortals if all our influence depends upon a bodily height we can never reach. That is a young notion of yours, my dear, which you will outgrow, I hope."

Thyrza felt she was being talked to, and did not like it at all; but Miss Morris returned to the subject in hand.

"However much you and your kind friend

may be at variance on some points, I am quite sure it would be right to go and see her. Now, my dear girl, I do not wish to find fault with you just as we are about to part, but I must tell you that I think you wrong, very wrong."

"I can't help that," said Thyrza, proudly.

"Can you pray for her night and morning, and yet reconcile this prolonged absence to your conscience? I do not think you can."

Thyrza's prayers were strictly matters of form, and her aunt Deborah was no more in her mind then than at other times. She saw no force in Miss Morris's question, argumentative though it was, and she only said, "I don't see what that has to do with it."

It was like speaking to a stone wall. Miss Morris made one last effort, which was not exactly an appeal to Thyrza's higher nature, but still she thought she might find a vulnerable part somewhere, so she tried again.

"Is Miss Thornton a person of property?"

"I believe so. I once heard (not from her, but from some one) that an old uncle left her—forty thousand, I think it was; and the house and some fields are hers I know."

"Then who will inherit this property?"

"Oh, *I* shall, of course; in fact, she has told me as much. Besides, every one knows that

she will leave it to me. I shall come in to everything without doubt."

"And could you possibly at her death take possession of her money and all belonging to her, knowing that during her life you had neglected what might have given her comfort? Supposing her a weak woman, which I do not believe her, surely her affection calls for some response on your part."

"She need not leave her money to me unless she likes," said Thyrza, "she is a free agent. I shall like it very well when it comes, I dare say, but I don't ask her for it; I cannot think *that* consideration can have any weight. I could never cringe and fawn for the sake of money; it is not in me to do it."

"I am very glad of it; but that was not my meaning. So far, it seems you are sure of it; well, then, is it so difficult to be grateful?"

"Is it not possible to be grateful at a distance without sacrificing my life to her?" asked Thyrza.

"Well, I do not understand such gratitude," said Miss Morris, feeling herself so intensely thankful to Miss Thornton for what she had done for her nephew, that she would have gone to the world's end to serve her had that been needful or possible, "but I'm afraid it

is useless to try to make you understand what I mean, so I will not detain you any longer. What time do you go to-morrow?"

"By the 2.30 train."

"Very well. Now I must write some letters."

And Thyrsa, feeling she was still mistress of the field, departed.

CHAPTER IX.

A WIDE sweep of sea with a picturesque coast, craggy, and covered mostly with furze and blackberry bushes on the left hand ; rounded hills on which sheep were feeding, and, lower down, white houses with green blinds, with a background of trees, and a low foreground of shining evergreens on her right—this was the view which met Thyrza as the fly which had brought her from the station turned into a road out of the village street ; a road more like a lane than anything else, with a high hedge on each side, under which were primroses and daisies, the latter just closing the pink fringes of their golden eyes in the gathering twilight. A very peaceful prospect, and even Thyrza's unappreciative eyes were pleased by the contrast with London dust and dinginess. She had parted from Miss Morris with no regretful feelings, and

was all eagerness to begin her new life untrammelled by the rules of a school. "It was too jog-trot an existence for me," she said to herself, looking upon the future before her with undoubted faith in its power to bring her all she wanted ; and she was building castles in the air without any misgivings, when the fly stopped before one of the prettiest of the white houses half way up the rising ground.

A very neat parlourmaid showed her upstairs into a room the very perfection of comfort, with windows looking out upon the sea, and with a nearer prospect of budding trees and hedgerows, and grey cottages with warm red roofs. Inside, the house seemed very still, and she wondered that no one had come to welcome her ; and accustomed to think much of her own importance, was quite ready to resent this when, after a tap at the door, Mrs. Witherne came in.

She was a gentle-looking widow, perhaps a little over thirty, with a sweet smile and sad, quiet eyes, looking rather as if some light had been quenched in them than as if it had never existed.

"I hope you have had a good journey," she said in a kind tone, holding Thyrza's hand in hers, and looking into her face.

"A very good journey, thank you. And what a lovely place this is!"

"Yes, we are very fond of it. I hope you will soon feel at home with us; the children are all anxiety to see you. They will show you all the walks, and be so delighted to have a companion. I have been obliged to keep them very quiet lately on account of Colonel Baird, but he is better now."

Thyrza wished very much to know who Colonel Baird was, but of course could not ask. Mrs. Witherne was a person with whom no one could dream of taking a liberty, and so Thyrza felt. She only asked when she should see the children.

"They are waiting for you now in the school-room. The dinner-bell will ring directly, and then you will have time to make acquaintance before coming into the drawing-room."

"I am quite ready now," said Thyrza, and then she went with Mrs. Witherne down a long passage, at the end of which was a door, and from within came a sound of voices as Mrs. Witherne opened it.

"Grace, come and shake hands with Miss Bryant," and Thyrza was greeted shyly by an awkward-looking girl of ten, with high shoulders, and a face apparently all nose. There

were two other children in the room, a boy of seven who was seated on the table at first, but scrambled down at a look from his mother, and a little fairy-looking girl of five, with soft light hair, and a face very much like her mother's.

"Now, my dears, I shall leave Miss Bryant with you, and you must all be very quiet and good. Draw that chair to the fire, Harold,—and get a footstool, Grace, and let Miss Bryant have her tea in peace."

Thyrza was not easily put out of countenance ; but still, when Mrs. Witherne had left her, and she sat at tea with Harold's great eyes fixed upon her, she was inclined to wish he would not stare so ; and it was very stupid of that girl so strangely misnamed Grace to sit as if uttering a word were quite beyond her power.

"Was your father an officer ?" asked Harold presently, not taking his eyes from her face.

The question might be flattering in one sense, but it was rather confusing, at least so Thyrza thought, and the colour rushed to her face in a way which made her very angry. There was nothing for it but to answer coolly, "No ; what makes you ask that ?"

"I was only wondering. I like soldiers ; I'm going to be a soldier some day ; in the Guards, you know."

Thyrza appeared duly impressed by the announcement, and the boy went on.

"Uncle Charles isn't in the Guards, but he's very jolly for all that."

Thyrza did not care particularly to know about Uncle Charles, so she said nothing.

"He's better now, you know," went on Harold, unheeding her silence, "but he cannot walk straight. I'd rather be wounded in battle than get hurt by being pitched out of a dog-cart, wouldn't you?"

"If I were a soldier I should certainly."

"He hurt his head," said Grace, almost as if she had had a struggle with herself before getting the words out.

"Very much?" asked Thyrza.

"Yes; he's had a fever since, and all his hair is gone," said Harold.

"But he wears a wig," said the smallest child, as if she felt that made up for a good deal.

"But that does not prevent him from walking straight, does it?" said Thyrza, glad to lead away from the question of her own parentage.

The children laughed, Harold in great glee, and it was some little time before he could explain that "he got his right leg smashed, you know."

"Oh dear, that was very sad."

"But he's much better now," said Grace ;
"he walked down to the beach this morning."

It was evident that Colonel Baird and Uncle Charles were one and the same person, and Thyrsa showed a little more interest in the conversation, and did her best to avoid its returning to the subject of Harold's first remark.

After tea she sat in the easy chair, with Harold perched upon one arm of it ; and Grace asked if lessons would begin to-morrow morning, or whether, as had been the case on the arrival of a former governess, they were to have the first day free.

"Well, perhaps to-morrow the best thing will be to get everything in order for the next day. What lessons do you learn ?" she asked, turning to the little girl.

"She doesn't know her letters yet," said Harold, contemptuously

"What is your name ?" asked Thyrsa.

"Blanche."

"And you don't know your letters ? that is very shocking," and Thyrsa looked so very much as if she thought it so, that Blanche coloured and looked down.

In the drawing-room afterwards the children and Colonel Baird made a great deal of noise round his sofa while Mrs. Witherne and Thyrsa

talked ; and as the children and their studies formed the staple subject of their conversation, the new governess began to grow weary, and to wish that a little of the attention given by the handsome uncle to Harold and his sisters could have been diverted to her.

All that she gathered that evening was, that Harold was very fond of argument and reasoning ; that Grace had excellent abilities, but was very shy ; and that Blanche required a great deal of sympathy and tact ; so that Thyrza had a rather wearied idea of things in general when she went to bed.

The next day was spent in arranging books and making out a plan of lessons, varied by a long stroll on the beach in the middle of the day, and a shorter one in the lanes in the evening.

On the next morning work was to begin in earnest.

Anxious to commence at once according to line and rule, Thyrza forbade any talking but what was necessary, and, glad to see she had made an impression, began with teaching Blanche her letters while Grace and Harold wrote.

“ When I’m a man,” began Harold.

“ Silence !” from Miss Bryant.

An impatient jerk, and finally a kick at the table from the leg which seemed as if swinging

backwards and forwards were the limit of its capabilities, showed the boy's feelings at this rebuke.

"Hush, Harold ! that will never do."

"Grace, how you are stooping ! sit up, my dear."

An order difficult to obey, for Grace pulled herself upright with a violent effort, and then subsided into her normal condition.

"How very stupid you are, Blanche ! I have told you six times at the very least that that letter is B, and you will persist in calling it K."

Blanche burst into tears.

"Miss Bryant."

"Well, Harold, what is it ?"

"Do you really think Job was as patient as he is made out to be ?"

"Of course. Don't ask foolish questions."

"But I say, you know——"

"Now, Harold, this will not do. Have you finished that copy ?"

"Nearly: I have done three lines out of seven."

"That is not half yet ; and oh, the blots ! Grace, you are stooping again. And don't look like that when you are found fault with ; you must learn to take reproof amiably. Now, Blanche, I can have no temper. What is that letter ?"

"B-e-e-e," with a long drawn sob.

"And what is that?"

"After a great deal of consideration Blanche announced her conviction that the letter was R, which answer had the effect of making Thyrza wonder whether or not it would be advisable to give her a shake.

"Now find out all the B's on this page."

"I'm tired," said Blanche.

"Oh, that has nothing in the world to do with it. Go on, and don't be naughty."

"I'm not naughty."

"Don't tell stories, my dear; you are very naughty, indeed."

"I don't tell stories."

"Now, Blanche, if I have any more of this nonsense you must be punished. You *are* naughty, and you *have* told a story; because you cannot possibly be tired, it is quite silly to say so."

Whereupon Blanche began to cry again, and Harold told her not to make such "a row."

"I cannot allow you to use slang, Harold."

"I didn't, did I?"

"What do you call 'a row' if not slang?"

"Oh, bother! Miss Smith never found fault with things of that sort."

"Don't quote Miss Smith to me ; go on with your copy.—Now, Blanche, will you or will you not be good ?"

Blanche made a violent effort, and recognised two or three obnoxious B's ; after which she was released and allowed to pursue the comparatively soothing employment of copying figures on her slate.

Having struggled through his copy, Harold read a chapter in English history, in the course of which he freely vented such epithets as he thought proper and suitable to the various personages figuring in the same, and began to argue about Perkin Warbeck till Thyrsa was at her wit's end to know how to silence him. She was not fond of going into things, and took it for granted that historical affairs had been settled once for all ; what was the good of raking them up again ? she thought.

"It's very funny, you know," said Harold ; "people look at things from different points, at least so Uncle Charles says. Now I've one history where it pitches into Cromwell like fun, and says King Charles was a saint and a martyr, and all that sort of thing ; and in the other it says Cromwell was one of the best men that ever lived, and Charles no great shakes after all."

"I am quite sure it does not say anything so vulgar as that."

"As what?"

"As 'no great shakes.'"

"Oh, well, but you know what it means."

Thyrza was constrained to own that she did.

"All right, then. Well, then, one book makes out that George the Third was the greatest boon to England that a nation ever had, and the other only says he was a jolly old duffer, or something of that sort."

"Hush, Harold! I really cannot allow such talk.—How are you writing that French exercise, Grace? Pretty well; but what a mistake in the terminations! Do you know what conjugation this is?"

Grace was all at sea on the subject, and Thyrza spent a quarter of an hour in explanations, glad to be released for a while from Harold's tiresome questions. He was working sums now in a rule which he knew, so that there was comparative peace. But by the time Grace had grasped the sense of what she had to do, Blanche and Harold had finished their several occupations, and were on her hands again.

It was not, perhaps, a very easy thing to provide instruction of different kinds for all three; and Thyrza, who had been used to give

lessons always in class, where the capacities of one and all must be stretched to a certain line, and where scant mercy was shown to those who unfortunately came short of it, found this teaching quite another thing, and was very glad when noon, the hour of release, arrived. She had never accustomed herself to adaptation to the minds she was supposed to cultivate, and felt herself now sadly at a loss. However, Harold was off her hands as soon as he was on the beach, and the little girls played together, so that when lunch-time came she was in better humour with all three.

Mrs. Witherne forbore to ask questions so early, having seen Blanche's little tear-stained face as she was going up to be dressed for her walk. She knew Harold was apt to stray away from the point in question to argue about something which puzzled him, and she was aware that her brother had not made him more tractable since they had been together; but she hoped Miss Bryant would be patient, and looked at her to see if she could judge by her expression.

Her face was animated and pleasant enough now, for Colonel Baird was talking to her on some topic of general interest, and she liked his notice, and was at no loss with her answers.

Mrs. Witherne could gather nothing of what she wanted to know from the present aspect of her face, and devoted herself to the little girls.

"Come for your music lesson in a quarter of an hour, Grace," said Miss Bryant as they left the dining-room, and the little girls ran after their mamma.

"Yes, I'll come."

But a quarter of an hour passed, then half an hour, and Grace did not present herself, so Thyrsa went to smmmon her. She found her seated in one of the windows of the upper passage, absorbed in a fairy tale.

"My dear Grace, what do you mean by this?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Bryant, I quite forgot,—and my book was so interesting."

"It was very rude to keep me waiting; don't you know that?"

"Yes; I'm really very sorry—I am, indeed. Oh, let me see—this is my last piece," as she turned over hurriedly the very untidy contents of a music-case.

"I don't want your piece. Where are your studies?"

"I think they are all torn. Oh, here's a leaf, and here are ever so many more. Miss Smith did mend the stupid old book once, but it looks rather queer now, doesn't it?"

Thyrza turned over the loose leaves, and succeeded in finding some few studies that were not torn. She set them up on the desk, and Grace, with trembling fingers, began to play.

She was very nervous—frightened to a degree which would have seemed pitiful to any sympathising person. But Thyrza did not know what nervousness meant; it was all stupidity or obstinacy, she said; and Grace, who was guilty of neither the one nor the other, felt the injustice, and grew more nervous than ever.

“This is terrible!” said Thyrza at last. “Now go through that study again.”

Grace tried. She knew the study perfectly, and could have played it well enough alone; but with Miss Bryant sitting so straight and tall and dark beside her, like one of the Furies, playing it properly was out of the question. Her fingers turned cold and damp, the keys seemed stiff, all the notes danced before her in a mad whirl, and finally she burst into tears.

“Don’t be so childish,” said Thyrza, severely. “I really never saw two such babies as you and Blanche; it is quite absurd. It would be much better to try and improve than to cry in that foolish manner.”

Poor Grace did her best, but she failed, and felt herself in dreadful disgrace as she left the

piano,—on the first day, too! The child had a tender heart and conscience, and was very miserable. This condition was in itself an annoyance to Thyrza; she was not in the habit of feeling anything deeply, and though she would have been very angry had her scolding made no impression, she was very vexed at seeing the object of her indignation in tears. It was a bad beginning for the afternoon's work; but Blanche was absent, and it was a comfort to know she was not old enough for school twice a day; it was sufficiently tiresome as it was.

"You shall write some dictation, Harold," said Thyrza, when she had captured him at last, for he was hunting Blanche up and down the passages, and did not feel any desire for study.

"All right."

It was far from all right, to judge by the specimen of orthography shown to Thyrza at the expiration of half an hour. The spelling was, in fact, quite unique; and, wanting the sense of humour which would have made her smile, Miss Bryant was only angry with the stupidity, as she thought it, of her pupil.

"What spelling! *paper* spelt *peighpour*! What could you be thinking of?"

"Why, that's the right way, isn't it?"

"Of course not."

"Well, you spell neighbour that way, and paper as good as rhymes with it, only you want p's instead of b's."

"It is quite wrong, at any rate."

"But why is it wrong?"

"I cannot waste time in argument," said Thyrza; "it is wrong because it is wrong. Surely that is enough."

"That's only a woman's reason," said Harold audaciously.

"How dare you speak to me in that way, Harold?"

The word "dare" roused all the soldier-spirit in the boy.

"Dare! oh, I'd dare anything. I only spoke the truth."

"But it was very rude," said Grace, in a low voice.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bryant," said Harold, in such a different tone that Thyrza was mollified, and said no more about the reason of spelling "paper" in the orthodox manner.

The dictation exercise was so full of mistakes that correction was hopeless. Silently resolving to give him something of a more rudimentary kind next time, Thyrza thought it would be well to sound him further as to his grammatical

knowledge, and asked him to tell her the past participles of various verbs.

The lesson went on in this fashion :

“ Walk ?”

“ Walked.”

“ Preach ?”

“ Praught.”

“ How absurd ! Now think, Harold, the past participle of the verb ‘ to preach.’ ”

“ Praught, it must be ; you say teach—taught ; then of course it stands to reason it's preach—praught.”

“ I never saw such ignorance !”

“ But, Miss Bryant, now do tell me why one should be different from the other ? I really can't get on if I don't know the reasons of things.”

He was not saying it only to worry her, but because he was of such an argumentative turn of mind that it really fretted him not to find the why and wherefore of everything that puzzled him.

Thyrza got out of her difficulty in a way open to every native of our beloved island, by saying that the language was very irregular, and there were exceptions to all rules.

“ It's the stupidest old language, then, on the

face of the earth. What's the good of grammar I should like to know?"

Thyrza had no scholarly love for digging deep down for the roots of words, or she would have been overjoyed to meet with such a mind as Harold's.

Cousin Deborah, who had always had a great fancy for studying the formation of language, had tried her best, when teaching Thyrza, to imbue her with the same spirit, but all in vain. Certainly she had lived long enough in the atmosphere of lessons to be able to tell, without much trouble to herself, whether many words in ordinary use were derived from the Greek or from the Latin, but as to taking pleasure in tracing them to their source, that was entirely another thing.

She was vexed with the little boy for his pertinacious inquiries, and the more he asked the more she turned a deaf ear to his questions, and in her own mind longed for the class of girls at Miss Morris's, in whom, for the most part, docility and stupidity were synonymous terms.

She could hear lessons, and correct exercises, and keep excellent order, but she was quite ignorant of the first principles of the art of teaching, though to have told her so would have been a dangerous experiment.

So, as the days went on, she allowed Harold to write *phind*, and *phriend*, and *snuphers*, and instead of explaining his mistakes, contented herself with drawing her pen with a very deliberate dash through the offending words, and making him write them out an endless number of times, whereby she tired him instead of herself, which she had not a doubt was the right thing to do.

She was becoming disenchanted. Her present life was not what she had expected it to be. The three children gave her more trouble than she had had with the whole school before, and, crowning impertinence and vexation of all, Mrs. Witherne evidently looked to her to help in amusing them out of school hours. It was bad enough to have them to teach, but to make dolls' clothes for Blanche, or advise Grace in the sowing and planting of her little garden, was rather too much.

She had been engaged to teach them, not to play with them, and she was a very Shylock in keeping to the letter of the bond.

"Here's an awful cram—I mean, what a big story!" said Harold one morning, brought to order in the middle of his sentence by one glance from Miss Bryant's eye; "it says here, 'Nothing in the economy of nature is ever lost,' and that's a story, if ever there was one. I lost my pocket-

knife three weeks ago, and I can't find it anywhere. I wish the old muffs would write truth."

A deeper mind than Thyrza's would have shown the child the writer's meaning, would have bidden him notice how the drops of rain, falling into the earth or sea from the clouds, were not lost, but silently drawn up again in mist or vapour, so that the upper fountains of water should be constantly replenished ; or would have shown him how the dead leaves, sinking into the soft mould, were far from lost even when all trace of their original substance was gone, but that the trees and plants absorbed into their juices the essence of the decaying things to reproduce it again in such form as was meet in the eyes of the great Author of life.

She knew all this in a kind of careless, indifferent way, but did not value her knowledge as the key to a great and wonderful mystery, which in reverent hands would unfold so much to the young asking spirit, baffled in its contest with what seemed only dry, soul-less words.

But she was neither intellectual nor religious, and was far enough removed from kindred to those minds combining both qualities, and to whom the study of nature gives boundless pleasure.

So the child's false impression was left uncontradicted, and he was told to attend to his

lessons, and not ask absurd questions about what did not concern him. The consequence was, on his part a dogged indifference to the task before him, with a sharper and more decided tone on the part of his so-called teacher, so the the atmosphere of the school-room was anything but that of peace.

"I can't stand this much longer," said Thyrsa to herself, after a month with her new pupils ; so the very morning on which she came to this conclusion, it being rainy at noon, and a walk out of the question, she left the children to their own devices, and presented herself before their mother, prepared to lodge a complaint against them.

The expression of her face was ominous, and not lost upon Mrs. Witherne, who was, however, not in the habit of condemning at once without making inquiry ; so she invited Thyrsa to a seat, and prepared to listen with a mind as impartial as could be under the circumstances.

"I don't know what to do with the children," said Thyrsa ; "they are so very stupid."

Now no mother, however stupid herself, likes to be told that her children are so, and Mrs. Witherne was far from stupid. But something in the face of the girl before her made her inclined to be patient, and she said kindly :—

"I am very sorry you find them so ; I cannot say I think them so myself."

"Mothers never do," said Thyrza, who was utterly devoid of tact, and, it may be added, of native politeness.

"No, we are apt to be partial, I know ; but tell me some case in point, and if I can help you I will."

"Grace's music is something fearful. I really don't know what to do with her."

"She is very nervous, I know."

"Oh, I don't believe in nerves."

"Do you not ? I hope you may never be forced to do so by experience."

Mrs. Witherne smiled as she said this, and Thyrza went on.

"It is ridiculous for a child of her age to get such fancies into her head. She plays well enough when I am out of the room, but the moment I open the door it is one confused jumble, very -trying to any one with a musical ear."

Thyrza said this very much as if Mrs. Witherne were herself devoid of the possession of an ear, but her only reply was—

"Do you scold or encourage Grace about it ?"

"Oh, I scold, of course, because it is evidently done on purpose. It would make no difference

to me whether I played alone or before the Queen ; why should it ?”

She was evidently deficient in comprehension on this point, so Mrs. Witherne forbore to argue it ; she remarked instead :

“ Perhaps if you encouraged her a little she might do better. She has a very humble opinion of her own powers, and it would help her to be told she *could* play.”

“ She must know that herself without telling.”

“ Probably, to a certain extent ; but she has a high standard of perfection, and is not easily satisfied with anything she does. It would help her to show you believed in her possession of ability.”

“ Would not that make her conceited ?”

Mrs. Witherne shook her head.

“ I don’t think you quite understand Grace,” she said. “ Conceit is not a fault of hers, but discontent is. Now if you give her a little hope, it will help her to get rid of this failing. Do you understand ?”

Thyrza felt that Grace was getting all the sympathy, and turned to the consideration of Harold’s sins against her as a field whereon she must be conqueror.

“ Yes, I know he has an inquiring mind, and I know also that his questions are apt to worry

one sometimes, when one's mind is not free to attend to them. But then I always think we should be very reverent indeed with a child, and put things of less moment aside in order to help him. It may cost us a little at the time, but afterwards we are amply repaid."

"He asks such very absurd questions sometimes."

"Does he? Well, I think we elders often do that too. Still, we ought to respect a child's desire for knowledge, when the desire is not in itself wrong. I do not think Harold ever asks anything for the sake of asking."

Thyrza was doubtful about that. She was inclined to think he did; and then objected to his desire to learn from a little work on geology which his uncle had given him, saying she thought he ought to master the art of spelling before taking up anything so dry as science.

"Harold will not find it dry, I think; and spelling will come to him in time, perhaps; it did to me, I know. But suppose you hold out a lesson in geology as an inducement to him in overcoming his other difficulties."

Thyrza was of a very uncompromising turn of mind. She held that he ought to learn because it was right; in other words, because she ordered him to do so, and rather scouted the idea of

holding out a reward, but, after a while, consented to make the attempt.

Then the shortcomings of poor little Blanche were discussed, Thyrza saying she thought her very sulky.

"There I cannot agree with you. But I own it is trying, the having to say over and over again the same thing ; but still she is improving, I think."

"She knows her letters, but that is all."

"That is the first step accomplished. I know it needs much patience," added Mrs. Witherne, kindly, "and if we lack it naturally, teaching is the greatest possible help in cultivating it ; I mean both active and passive patience,—that which helps us to keep still, and that which helps us to go on ; don't you find it so ?"

"I am not naturally impatient," said Thyrza. "I can always get on with pupils who are neither obstinate nor stupid."

"You are certainly very blind, whatever else you may be," thought Mrs. Witherne, but she said nothing, remembering the dimness of her own mental vision at the age of twenty.

In rushed Harold to ask his mother a question, and Thyrza left ; the only present result to herself of the interview being, the conviction in her own mind, that Mrs. Witherne was as stupid as her children.

CHAPTER X.

"TELL me a love story, Cousin Deborah."

But that was a sort of thing which Miss Thornton never seemed disposed to do. Whether she thought it treading on ground dangerous to her peace of mind, and likely to end in queries which she was not disposed to answer, or whether she felt an inaptitude for the style of narrative proposed, she could probably have decided better than any one else. Certain it is, that when Emily Gibson, sitting under the old pear tree in the Cottage garden at her cousin's feet, received to her appeal much the same reply that had been given to others before herself, including the Sutcliffe girls and Emily's own sisters, Nelly and Alice, she never dreamed of making it again, and yet Cousin Deborah had said very little; only, "Suppose you tell me one instead."

It was a delicious spring day. Every tree and shrub was bursting into leaf and blossom under the genial rays of the April sun. Bees were burying themselves in the dark perfumy blossoms of the wallflowers, and hovering round the patches of white alyssum, as if delirious with joy ; the lilacs were in bud, and the high garden wall was white with cherry-blossoms. Little frolicsome breezes were stirring the boughs overhead, and from time to time scattering blossoms from the old pear tree on the lap of Emily as she sat on the grass beneath. There was a perfect chorus of larks and thrushes, delicious music in the sweet warm stillness, and overhead was a sky so glorious in its bright blueness that it would scarcely bear looking at, even through the branches of the pear tree. Emily was silent after Cousin Deborah's remark. She might have answered it, but then the love story wherein her interests most centred, namely, her own, had only just begun, and it was far too delightful to talk about, at least at present. After a while, perhaps, when the first volume was ended, she might venture to speak of it, for she would have grown more accustomed to it by that time ; though, as she sat in the sunny garden, with the young leaves casting flickering shadows on the grass, and everything telling of

love and life and hope, and sympathising with her in the fresh spring-time of her youth and new-found happiness, it seemed to her that her story could never grow tame, or like any other story, to be talked over and commented upon. No ; though she knew that she could not tell it to one more sympathising than Cousin Deborah, even to her she could not trust herself yet to speak of it ; it was too precious a treasure to display to any one ; she would keep it sacred to Fred Sutcliffe and herself till—well, she could not say exactly when ; perhaps the story would tell itself ; the violets kept their buds hidden under their broad green leaves till the sun wooed them into the development of their fragrant beauty, and then any one who passed the bank could guess, without telling, what made the air so sweet.

Miss Thornton did not remark on the silence ; she only played absently with one of Emily's dark curls, and thought how pretty she was, and how good and loving, how unlike her own darling. Yes ; this was the thought that was always intruding. It was four years and a half now since Thyrza had left her, and she had never seen her once since. Was it to be wondered at if every fresh young spirit that came in her way suggested painful comparisons ?

By some means or other Emily's thoughts had travelled in the same direction, and her next remark was, "I wish Thyrza would write; it is more than a month since you heard, is it not?"

"Yes; just before she went to Mrs. Chamberlaine's; it seems a long time, particularly as I am anxious to know whether she will be happy there."

"Oh, she is sure to be happy," said Emily, without weighing the facts of the case; the truth being that she was so supremely happy herself, she could not imagine any one else to be otherwise. "Her very name is a happy one," she went on; "Thyrza—Pleasantness; what could be more delightful? I like a name with a meaning, especially when it is a nice one; don't you?"

"Yes," said Miss Thornton, absently. She was thinking that Thyrza was very unlike her name, both in herself and in her influence upon others; but she would not say so to Emily. Thyrza's grave faults had been kept in the background as much as possible, and Emily had no very clear idea of the kind of girl she was. True, she often wondered why she never came home, but as Cousin Deborah always spoke of her with affection, and she knew they corresponded,

she thought there could not be much amiss, and classed her constant absence among the many mysteries which would be cleared up some day.

"Have you been into the poultry-yard this morning, Cousin Deborah?"

"No; why?"

"I went before breakfast to see the state of affairs. Old Speckle has eight darling little chickens, and the ducklings look fluffier and more like balls of floss silk than any I ever saw. Won't you come?"

"Yes, in a minute or two. But first, what are your plans for to-day?"

"Oh, I've no plans, it is all so delightful. I shall go to the rectory presently, that comes as a matter of course; and afterwards Fanny and I may perhaps stroll on to the Mill cottages. I have that frock to finish for my small niece, and I ought to write to mamma, but I think it is very doubtful whether I accomplish anything but the rectory, for I should like a drive with you this afternoon."

"Very well, but let us make the tour of the garden first; I want to see how the things are coming on."

There were great round masses of peony with large green buds, irises just ready to push forth their blossoms, sweetbriar making the air

delicious, and here and there among the fresh green, tall plants of honesty, with their spikes of lilac and white, looking very gay and happy, for they and the wallflowers had no rivals in the way of large plants in blossom, except, indeed, the bushes of flowering currant which hung rosy tassels from their soft green stems, and looked radiant against the background of shining laurels skirting the garden on the rectory side. Across the lawn, behind more shrubs, conspicuous among which glowed the barberry flowers, was the long, shady strip of ground which went by the name of the lily-bed ; for here the smooth, exquisitely formed leaves were shooting up tall and straight from the black earth, and unfolding their elegant shape with graceful curves as only lilies can. Scattered among them were a few wood-anemones, which had come there nobody knew how or when ; but probably long ago, when the garden was first planted, they had left the woods in company with their fair sisters, and were still content to bloom amongst them year after year, though there were no blue bells nor primroses here, as there had been in their native haunts.

It was a pleasant journey round the well-kept flower-garden, and not less so was that which the two afterwards took round the kitchen-garden at

the back, where the currants hung their pale green flowers, and the strawberries showed here and there a white star among their dark leaves. One or two apple trees were donning their spring attire, and the plum and pear trees were one mass of white. They sauntered up and down, taking note of the spikes of asparagus, and the smooth leaves of the early lettuces with admiring eyes. Presently they turned into the yard at the back, where the chickens were, and half an hour soon slipped away in this pleasant, easy enjoyment of the young spring-time, so that Emily was astonished when the church clock struck eleven.

"You will come with me?" she said, holding the laurel gate open for Miss Thornton to pass through.

Cousin Deborah did not hesitate; always excepting John Gibson and his wife, the Sutcliffes were her dearest friends. She had rejoiced with them when their eldest son had accomplished what his sisters had called "that very indigestible business," eating his terms, and had been the first to congratulate them when the tidings of his first brief had reached the rectory. She had made one of the happy group standing in the old church on Louisa's wedding day; and had wept, almost as her own

mother had wept, over little May's pure pale face as she lay amid rosebuds and lilies sleeping her last peaceful sleep. Sweet little May! it was nearly two years since her sunny curls and merry smile had been hidden from sight under the old hawthorn near the chancel door; but every morning the dear old friend whose desolate heart she had comforted went to look at the green mound; and if flowers were to be found in the Cottage garden, it needed only a glance at the child's grave to know it. Cousin Deborah had been there already, and now went straight up to the rectory door with Emily.

"I thought you were never coming!" exclaimed Fanny, as she came out to meet them.

"You must blame the old hen, for her chickens detained me," said Emily, laughing.

Mrs. Sutcliffe and Miss Thornton had gone into the house together, so the two girls strolled round the garden.

"I wish you would go with me to North Walford this afternoon. We could drive there soon after lunch, and call at the post-office for the letters, and do a variety of things."

"I should like it extremely; but Cousin Deborah—I never wish to leave her behind."

"Well, I know mamma wants her to come in this afternoon, so that needn't hinder us.

She looks grave this morning ; has she had any bad news—of Thyrza, I mean ?”

“ No—why should she ? You have no reason for asking, have you ?”

“ None, except her grave looks ; and there is always a sort of fear in one’s mind about Thyrza. I do wish she would come home.”

“ So do I, with all my heart ; but I don’t think Cousin Deborah is really so very unhappy about her. It does seem horribly ungrateful of Thyrza, certainly. I can’t make her out.”

“ Nor can any one. When did Miss Thornton hear last ?”

“ More than a month ago.”

“ Well, then, she cannot be long before writing again, one would think. By-the-way, papa heard from Fred this morning.”

“ Did he ?” said Emily, tugging at a piece of sweetbriar as if her life depended on breaking it off, and either the exertion of doing so, or something else, making her very uncomfortably red in the face. “ The postman treated us very badly at the Cottage—only the stupid old newspaper, as if any one cared for that.”

Fanny looked as if she could have told Emily a good deal, but she held her peace, and after a little more desultory chat the two girls went into the house.

"Emily would like to go with me this afternoon, mamma, so we had better make out a list of what we want—Miss Thornton, can we do anything for you?"

"Those magazines at Forman's, they ought to have been bound long ago. If you would call for them I should be glad."

"Very well. Anything else?"

"The post-office."

"Oh yes, we shall call there; and if you remember anything more, Emily can tell me. Don't trouble that dear little head of yours this morning;" and Fanny took Cousin Deborah's face between her hands and kissed it.

Miss Thornton smiled up into the bright eyes. She was used to Fanny's caresses, and the affection which prompted them was very pleasant to her, only there was a gauge of comparison in her mind's eye which would persist in measuring Thyrza by other girls, so that little spontaneous demonstrations like this always had a touch of pain in them, though she would not on any account have let it be seen.

"You are two idle children this morning," she said fondly, "and I am afraid we old folks are not much better. The spring mornings are very delightful certainly, but they make one somewhat disinclined for work."

"There is no reason whatever why you should not take that jelly to Jane Brewer," said Mrs. Sutcliffe. "Come, Emily, a walk to the Mill cottages will not be too much for your energies, will it?"

The girls laughed, and presently disappeared with their basket round the corner of the church-yard wall.

The drive to North Walford that afternoon was very pleasant, and the girls made the most of it, for the road was hilly, and the pony went up and down after a fashion of his own, which was a cautious one to say the least of it, and afforded them ample time to notice how green the hedges were growing, and mark the varying tints on the Fairleigh woods to the left. It was a very quiet road, and the banks on both sides were full of primroses, while between them and the road a little narrow stream trickled over the chalk and pebbles, making a white thread amidst the grass. They could hear the cuckoo in the distance, and then Emily broke out :

"When daisies pied, and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cowslip buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadow with delight ;
The cuckoo then on every tree
Hails the sweet spring, and loud sings he."

Here Fanny joined in, and the sweet old song lasted them a mile or two, by which time the towers and spires of North Walford were in sight, and the road had more travellers on it, so that they kept the expression of further sentiment to themselves, and encouraged the pony to a little more exertion on his part, as the road was growing easier.

Emily had often been to North Walford before, but she loved the old town, and never tired of noticing the quaint aspect of its narrow streets, where scarcely any two houses were alike, and where overhanging gables kept the lower part in deep shadow, while the plastered walls, marked in divers patterns, bulged out under their steep tiled roofs in a way decidedly picturesque, although possibly suggestive of sinking foundations. Then, all at once, in the middle of a blank wall, would come to sight a beautiful archway, evidently leading nowhere at this present time, but telling of some old monastic building long since vanished from the face of the earth. Hideous corbels grinned over many of the shop doorways, and oriel windows with rich mullioned tracery looked out over names underneath—such as “Spriggs, butcher,” and “Hawkworthy, draper and grocer,”—while the very names of the quaint old streets had a

charm of their own, for they were either St. Mary's, or St. Martin's, or Shodfriar's Lane, or Broad Street—the last a sad misnomer according to present usage, and apt to make one wonder whether even originally it had not been named in a moment of bitter irony on the part of the proprietor. Then Woodruffe Court and May-pole Square spoke for themselves of a sweetness and beauty long passed away, while Fountain Lane still kept up its reputation for pure water, though, alas! in these degenerate days only by means of a pump. Such was the business part of the town.

Farther on, after steering one's carriage safely round sharp corners and up dreadfully steep and narrow lanes, there would appear fine old houses of white stone, standing high up from the road, and divided from it by a paved causeway with iron poles and chains. Here were the abodes of the professionals, some two or three clergymen, as many doctors, and perhaps nearly double the number of attorneys; for the law is apt to flourish in country towns where people are sensitive, and know how to stand up for their rights.

This aristocratic part of the town was in the parish of St. Peter's, and opposite was the fine old church, with the old low-roofed buildings

of the grammar-school just showing above the cloisters.

Emily took it all in, this sweet spring day, the old-world atmosphere harmonising, strangely enough she thought, with the freshness of all things in the natural world. It did not sadden her as it might an older person whose spring-time was past; and the prosaic side of the question was only brought home to her when she felt the necessity, not to say difficulty, of keeping the pony up as they went slowly along the roughly-paved streets. Shopping was in itself great fun to the girls, for they had new summer dresses and hats to choose; and this, though bewildering, was very pleasant work. Then they called at the stationer's. Of course the magazines were not bound, although the man had had them three months; that was nothing, and Emily did not trouble particularly, for she reflected it would make another drive into the dear old town a necessity, and that was a pleasure worth having at any reasonable cost.

"Now for the post-office," said Fanny, turning the pony round.

Five letters were handed to her, and she looked eagerly at the writing.

"Three for papa, one for you, and one for

Miss Thornton,—Thyrza's writing, too ; that's a good thing ! Now, then, for home."

The pony was of a sensible order, and knew whither he was bound, so that the return drive was much more quickly accomplished than the other. The girls were eager to get home too, for both wanted to know what Thyrza's letter contained, to say nothing of having a desire to see whether the spring purchases would meet with approval.

Emily was to return to the rectory with Miss Thornton to dinner, but she ran into the Cottage in great glee, feeling sure she was bringing her cousin good news.

"Oh, here you are, Cousin Deborah, I have brought you your letter," and she put it into her hand.

There was a monogram on the envelope in dark blue, for Thyrza liked to do things in style, and had tried a variety of designs before she had contented herself with this, a bee, with something that a vivid imagination might liken to the initial of her Christian name behind it.

"Well, Cousin Deborah, is it all right ?" said Emily, who had been watching Miss Thornton's face as she read.

"Yes, dear, she seems quite happy, and likes

her new life immensely." But she did not show the letter ; its tone was cold, and she could not bear to expose Thyrza's deficiencies to any one, certainly not to the warm-hearted girl before her.

"Does she talk about coming home?"

"No. Perhaps she will take us all by surprise some day. She asks me for one thing, and I don't like to say 'No,' and yet I cannot say I wish to say 'Yes.'"

"What can it be?"

"She wants my likeness."

"Oh, that is nice ; now we shall have it, and we have been wanting it so long ! When shall you go to have it taken—to-morrow ? No ; that is market-day. The next day, then ?"

"Not so fast, Emily. It will be a dreadful ordeal to go through."

Emily laughed outright.

"You dear little old cousin ! It's nothing in the world. You have only to look pleasant."

"There's the difficulty."

"Not at all ; why, you always do look pleasant."

"Do I ? It is more than I feel ; but perhaps I may, occasionally, under the influence of some agreeable thought ; but to have to study my looks !—it is a thing I have never done in my life, and I am rather too old to begin."

"Oh, well, you will think better of it," said Emily, running off to dress.

"It may be all very well," said Cousin Deborah, as she stood before the glass making a very pretty effect with lavender ribbons and soft lace at the neck of her black silk dress—"all very well for a young girl full of life and spirits to imagine she can always look nice and bewitching, especially if she is being photographed with a view to the charming of a devoted lover; but at my age and with such a face too!" and she made a grimace at herself in the glass. Any pleasure which, as a girl, she might innocently have taken in her looks had been persistently snubbed out of her, and she had never yet recovered from her early impressions sufficiently to have sense to see that, if not regularly beautiful, she was still much better looking than most people.

"It would be *too* dreadful to hand myself down to posterity in this fashion," she concluded, "but still perhaps I ought; it may give her pleasure."

It is astonishing how a very little which may cause us some personal discomfort has the power to shut our eyes to what under other circumstances we should consider of vital importance. It suddenly flashed across Miss Thornton's mind

that the fact of Thyrza's wishing for her likeness was a very hopeful sign. True, she only wanted it as she had once wanted letters, in order to make a good impression on the people she was with, but Cousin Deborah was not to know this. She was very unsuspicious where Thyrza was concerned, and believed the best of whatever she did and said ; so she took herself sharply to task for having felt in the least unwilling to gratify so innocent a wish, and said to Emily as they went down the path to the laurel gate, " We can go the day after to-morrow, if you like, Emily, though of course it must depend upon the weather."

CHAPTER XI.

THERE are some lovely spots on the Surrey side of the Thames between Kingston and Hampton, houses whose grounds slope down to the river, and on whose smoothly shaven lawns stately cedars cast solemn shadows, while large weeping willows droop their graceful branches down almost into the water. From the upper windows there is a peaceful view over the river, and, beyond the grey palings, of the long straight avenues, and the rich foliage of Bushey Park. Herds of deer quietly feeding break the sameness of the green level ; and nearer home there is the winding river, with its green aits and its picturesque banks, a very fair picture, no matter what the season of the year may be. The houses vary in size and style, from the mansion, whose owner boasts a title, down, through various grades of villas, to the smaller, though not less attractive dwellings, which are

classed under the head of cottages. They are all screened from the high road at the back by high palings enclosing elms and limes of great height, in whose branches the nightingales "discourse sweet music" in the early summer, and which form at all times a shade from the southern sun. It was one of these cottages, by name Rosebank, in which Thyrza had now taken up her abode. Three months of Harold's questions, with the shyness of his sisters, had been really too unendurable, she had said to herself: so at the end of that time she had located herself with an old lady to whom she was to be companion, not only of her solitude, but of her drives and journeys, and who said she was willing to be to Thyrza as a grandmother.

Now *Punch's* type of the "sweet old lady" is by no means rare. There is something very reverend in white hair, and the soft pale cheeks which are as fair in their age as they were in youth, though with a different kind of beauty; and eyes which can only see the world through spectacles, are often far softer and kinder than those that have need of no assistance to point out what is wrong. Just as the autumn woods gather a warmer tint as their day draws near its close, so do the dear old ladies find their tempers and thoughts grow mellow and rich as

their year of life wanes. And it is of incalculable benefit to a young eager spirit to sit at the feet of those who have nearly finished the life upon which they are entering, and who have not only rich stores of knowledge and quiet comfort from which to draw for the benefit of the young ones, but who are full of love and sympathy for them in their troubles, which appear so formidable now, but which are only parts of a great plan upon which some day they may look back with the clearer vision of eighty years, and so looking, thank God.

Mrs. Bevan was one of these kindly old ladies ; she had suffered much, but her temper was sweet and bright, and after a hard voyage she was resting now at anchor within sight of the haven of peace. She was well off, so that Thyrza had every comfort, but she did not like her new life at all. The books which Mrs. Bevan enjoyed hearing were far too deep and thoughtful for her to care to read, and she found it irksome to take up stitches which in her knitting would sometimes be dropped. The drives might have been pleasant, she thought, with congenial society, but the companionship she had she did not care for ; and as to the evenings, they were, in her opinion, simply intolerable, for she could see no fun in cribbage

unless she won, and as Mrs. Bevan played well, that could not always be. Then the music was another sore point; the old lady liked songs she had known in her own early days, and had her own well-used books out of which Thyrza could have gratified her at very little cost to herself, but this did not suit her. As Mr. Gibson had once said of her, she was sadly deficient in veneration, and would think nothing of laughing to scorn the ancient ditties as too silly for anything. She gave an unbounded amount of trouble, so that though Mrs. Bevan was too kind-hearted to dismiss her, it was a great relief to her when Thyrza of her own accord expressed a wish to go. She had told Sophy Chamberlaine of her miserable life, as she called it, and as Mrs. Chamberlaine was just then wishing to meet with a companion for her elder daughter who would be at the same time governess to her younger one, she asked Thyrza to come. She knew her and liked her, and the proposal itself was so kindly and liberally made that Thyrza had no scruples whatever in leaving her old lady in the lurch and setting off to Rosebank.

It was looking very pretty, though only in the middle of March, when she arrived. The house was small, but planned to the best advantage, and there was no lack of comfort.

As to the view, though Thyrza had seen it both in summer and winter, it did not in its spring freshness strike her particularly, but she had known Alice her pupil some time, and felt sure she would be docile, and that was everything, she thought. Then, too, she liked Mrs. Chamberlaine, who was a widow in very fair circumstances, and by no means addicted to the habit of staying at home; she was accustomed to take Sophy about a good deal, and had announced her intention of treating Thyrza as a daughter, so that she might reasonably expect the same pleasure herself. Then, too, the Grahams lived at Surbiton, so that she had the prospect of seeing Percy again, and that was a very pleasing prospect indeed.

Percy Graham was a young man whose greatest misfortune was that he had not been brought up to do anything. His father had made a fortune in Australia, in what way people did not inquire, and so when he died his widow foolishly enough said her dear boy should never work for his living, as if work were not a man's vocation. Happily there was no great harm in Percy, over and above the laziness which did not decrease as he grew older. He had got through college without being plucked, and had never been near the

slightest fear of rustication. He had thought once or twice that a profession would have been an amusement, but had been unable to fix on one. He had sense enough to know he had no vocation for the church ; and medicine, he said, was not at all in his line ; as to the law, he was too lazy ever to argue a point ; and then what was left ? He had had a fancy for the army earlier in life, but had given it up because his mother said she could not bear to run the risk of having her dear boy killed ; and, under these circumstances, the navy was also not to be thought of. Now and then he would say he should go in for some Civil Service appointment, but had not yet found an inducement strong enough. It was a very sad position for any one to be in, though he scarcely felt it such. Meanwhile with his fine, tall figure, and fair hair and moustache, he was a great favourite at the houses of mammas with marriageable daughters, and made himself so universally agreeable after his lazy fashion, that no one cared to inquire into his antecedents ; besides, the fact of his wealth was patent, and to most people that was enough.

It is probable that if his two grandmothers had been living, those worthy dames might have opened his friends' eyes, by showing

certain little flaws in the art of speaking, such as ignoring or misplacing the letter H, with hopeless confusion respecting the application of the verbs to lie and to lay, and so forth ; but as none of the immediate ancestors were living, or at least forthcoming, the younger members of the family and their friends were in no danger of being shocked by such eloquent solecisms.

Percy's father, on his return with his wife and family from Australia, had bought a large house in a good neighbourhood, had wisely taken advice as to the furnishing thereof, and, by help of the *Heralds' College*, had set up a coat of arms, so that the family crest flourished on every available occasion. He had died when his son was seventeen, but his wife kept up everything in the style which he had begun, and played her part very well indeed. She was not fat, which was in her favour, for slim vulgarity is less obtrusive than that of the opposite kind. Then, too, she understood the art of dressing to perfection, and her manners were quiet. Her great ambition for Percy was that he should marry some one of good family. She had read in those romances wherein in early days she had delighted, of penniless earls whose daughters were not averse to the

idea of linking a title to the wealth they lacked, and she would think how well Lady Mary Graham would sound, or Lady Susan, or perhaps Lady Beatrice. But although she loved dearly to approach near to the grand ones of the earth, and a title was music to her ears, yet she had sufficient good sense to keep this little weakness to herself, and so passed muster very fairly. She was liberal with her money, though not lavish, wishing to be just and generous at the same time, so that, on the whole, she was freer from many of the failings apt to beset the *nouveaux riches* than is often the case. Her three daughters had been well educated, and were pretty, ladylike girls, with nothing in them, certainly, but that is no uncommon characteristic of young ladies. They could get in and out of a carriage gracefully, were very good croquet players, and dressed with taste. What more could such a mother as theirs desire?

Ever since the Chamberlaines had come to Rosebank six years ago the two families had been on friendly terms, and it was the remembrance of certain rather marked attentions which Percy had, from time to time, shown her, which helped to make Thyrsa delighted with her new quarters. She soon felt herself "one of the family," and the three hours in the

school-room every morning with Alice, though they might be sometimes tedious, were amply compensated for by the afternoon drives and pleasant evenings ; for she could be agreeable when it suited her purpose to be so ; and, added to Sophy's affection for her, she could see she stood high in the good graces of Mrs. Chamberlaine.

"Such a pleasant companion for dear Sophy," she would say, "and such a good governess for Alice ; I feel quite fortunate in having secured her. And then, you know, she is not *obliged* to teach. Her own home is made so unhappy for her, that I feel it my duty to make much of her here, poor girl."

It is really very wonderful what a recommendation it is to a governess when it can be said : "She is not obliged to teach." Formerly that a lady should be able to instruct her pupils well in their own language was considered a foundation on which to raise other qualifications. But now German (North) and French (Parisian), both acquired on the Continent, with music under Sir Ferdinand Strumwell, and drawing in every known style, bear away the palm.

Granted that there may be not seldom a certain mistiness with regard to facts which once were deemed important to know, what, in

the name of all things fashionable, does it signify if Simon de Montfort and Queen Elizabeth's Earl of Leicester be considered one and the same, so long as the German is that of Hanover, and the French that of Paris? But add, over and above all these essential recommendations, that the governess "is not *obliged* to teach," that her reason for doing so is the existence of a stepmother, or the fact of four sisters being unable to live together in peace, or that home is too narrow a sphere for a mind which has expanded by early acquaintance with the Continent—then, indeed, a governess needs nothing more; her position is fixed at once, and she may give herself a few airs and graces without fear of a set-down.

It did certainly occur to one or two friends to whom Mrs. Chamberlaine spoke thus favourably of Thyrza that, such being the case, it was a pity she should take up a post which others less favoured by fortune would have been very thankful to fill. But then they held the old-fashioned notion that even stepmothers might be endured; and that four sisters should learn how not to squabble, and that home was the proper place for a girl not called of necessity to leave it.

As a rule, the saving clause did a good deal

for Thyrza in the estimation of people. True, her French and German were only those of an ordinary English girl who had studied under good masters, but that did not particularly signify. Her music was good, and she was troubled with no foolish shyness or nervousness, so that every one agreed that it was a pleasure to hear her.

"Some one has taken the Hollies," said Mrs. Chamberlaine one morning at breakfast, about a month after Thyrza's arrival at Rosebank ; "there are workmen about, and the windows are open."

"Oh, I do hope they will be nice people," said Sophy, "the Foxes were so very disagreeable ; you know I told you about them, Thyrza."

"Yes, I remember quite well. It must be a great nuisance to have unpleasant neighbours."

"Oh, as to that, we are not obliged to know them ; we can find out something about them before they come, I dare say. With the Foxes it was different ; they were here first and called upon us, and then, of course, it would have been awkward not to have kept it up ; but they were very disagreeable for all that."

"What are you dreaming about, Alice ?"

"I mamma ? I was only thinking what a

lovely morning it was, and what a pity we could not walk before school instead of afterwards."

It certainly was a beautiful morning, quite as fair in that cottage by the Thames as in that other at South Walford, where Cousin Deborah and Emily were making the most of it under the pear tree in the garden.

Mrs. Chamberlaine noticed all at once how bright it was, and her sympathies went with Alice.

She could seldom find it in her heart to deny the child what she wished, and she turned to Thyrsa.

"Should you very much mind taking your walk before lessons this morning?" she asked.

Thyrsa and Sophy had been talking, so that what had passed between Alice and her mother had been unheard, otherwise she might have been less ready with her reply. She would not have cared to humour a child's fancy, but she liked to please herself, and certainly the river-bank did look very inviting this morning.

"I think it would be very nice," she said. "What is your opinion, Sophy?"

"The same as yours. And, mamma, if we should find it very bewitching must we limit ourselves to an hour?"

“Do as you like, it is a delicious morning.”

Alice gave her mother a kiss. She was a pale, delicate child of twelve, very fond of books, but fonder still of trees, and birds, and flowers. Thyrsa had no reason to find fault with her on the ground of being tiresome in any way, for she loved learning for its own sake, and did not ask too many questions. This did not arise from any lack of curiosity, but she had never yet found any one to answer her so as to satisfy the wants of her mind, and so she pondered over things by herself, living in a world of her own which was peopled by a good many quaint fancies and notions. Hers was a receptive nature, and she took in a good deal more than people supposed, turning things over again and again in her mind in vain endeavours to satisfy herself concerning them. But no one guessed what made her so quiet and pre-occupied ; only sometimes her mother, noticing the far-away look in her eyes, would remember the three graves in a quiet cemetery where Alice's sisters slept, and a sudden fear would cross her mind that perhaps this youngest darling might not be with her long. Everything but the sympathy she longed for, Alice had in abundance, and an amount of spoiling which would have ruined most children ; but

she had a sweet unselfish nature, and it did her good instead of harm.

The three set out for their walk when breakfast was over, in capital spirits. The long garden sloping down to the water's edge was looking very green and full of promise, and Alice sniffed the sweetbriar and flowering currant as she skipped before the others to open the gate. There was a ferry-boat not far off, by which they always crossed, and the old man who owned it soon landed them on the other side. How delicious it was—the smooth face of old Father Thames dimpling and twinkling in the sunshine, telling no tales of what that smiling surface might hide, while the sedges and reeds which fringed the banks whispered gently in the soft morning breeze. Under the grey park fence dog-violets were shining, and cowslips nodded here and there among the daisies. Thyrza and Sophy walked on regardless of Alice, who was too happy among the flowers to do more than flit about from one patch of beauty to another.

They had not gone very far before they came to a tree, felled in the autumn, which lay under the fence inviting them to rest. They were not tired certainly, but that was nothing, and the two sat down. Opposite, across the river, was a

large house overshadowed by trees, and in the grounds before it one large cedar with its dense black flakes of foliage stood grandly out from the softer tints around. Alice was wondering to herself who had planted that cedar, and whether the cone had been originally brought from Lebanon, when the gleaming of sunlight on dripping oars attracted her attention, and she called out :

“ There’s Percy ! look, Sophy ! ”

Alice had no scruples, and ran down the bank.

“ What brings you out so early ? ” she asked.

“ Couldn’t stay indoors. Who have you there ? ” for the two girls were under the shade of the fence, and partly hidden from any one on the water.

“ Only Sophy and Miss Bryant. ”

“ I wish you would ask them to come down. I can’t get out, for there’s not the ghost of a stump anywhere, and it wouldn’t do to turn the boat adrift. Ah, good morning. Like a row ? there’s plenty of room. ”

“ How far are you going ? ” asked Sophy.

“ Oh, that depends. It’s not the morning to stay indoors, and I’m not particular to an hour or two.—Come, Miss Bryant, what’s the difficulty ? ”

"None that I can see ; only we must not be too late for Alice's lessons."

"Oh, if that's all, you'll get over more ground—more water, I mean, in a boat in half an hour than you would in six if you walked. I'm really very sorry I can't do the polite, but if you will come just down to the edge, I'll have you in in no time. Come along, Alice."

Easier said than done, for the lower part of the bank was swampy, and Alice called out :

"Throw out one of the oars."

"But you can never walk on that !"

"Oh yes, I can."

"Well done," as he pulled her safe into the boat. "Now who comes next ?"

"You, Sophy," said Thyrza, drawing back with that absence of self-assertion which Mrs. Chamberlaine always thought so charming to witness.

"Is your head pretty steady ?" asked Mr. Graham.

Sophy was not sure ; but though she tottered a little, she reached the boat without harm, and then Thyrza followed.

She felt no fear and expressed none, and as Percy marked the steady, unconcerned way in which she placed one foot before the other in crossing the narrow bridge, he remembered that

comparisons were odious, or he would have made one aloud.

"Now then, who'll steer? will you, Alice?"

"No, don't let her. She will run us aground in one of her absent fits," said Sophy.

"Then who will?"

"Let me," said Thyrza,— "that is, if you can trust me."

Sophy was very willing to be spared trouble, and Thyrza liked something to control, so every one was satisfied, and the boat moved off.

Such a dreamy sensation one has on the water on a soft spring morning. The gliding motion, and the soft splash of water as the oars gleam backwards and forwards in the sunshine; the blueness of the sky, and the greenness of the young leaves blend so harmoniously, while the notes of the birds sound softer and more mellow as the boat passes under the trees. Then how beautiful are the green aits with their alders and willows and nests of water-fowl! and how softened are all the sounds by the flow of the stream! even the whistle of the train seemed far from discordant this morning as the boat went lazily on its way, by quiet gardens and under the shade of the park fence till Hampton Bridge came in sight, and then Percy said:

"Will you go on to Sunbury? there's plenty of time."

Of course no one said "No," the lazy enjoyment was so delicious. As they were coming back Sophy said :

"There are workmen at the Hollies, and mamma thinks it must be let."

"Shouldn't wonder; it's a great pity it should stand empty."

"We are anxious about the people. Suppose they shouldn't be nice?" said Sophy.

Percy laughed.

"Well, I shouldn't trouble myself beforehand if I were you; time enough for that when they've come. Why, here we are! And, marvel of marvels, behold a stump!"

"Why, of course there is, Percy! it isn't the first time you have been to see us in your boat;" and Alice looked at him rather bewildered.

Mr. Graham handed the ladies out, and made a little speech in a low voice to Thyrza *à propos* of her steering, which set her heart beating.

"You will come in, of course?" said Sophy, who had not been near enough to overhear his little remark.

"Well, yes, I rather think I will;" and then the boating party went into the house.

"Come, Alice, lessons," said Thyrza as soon as they were indoors.

Percy looked as if he would like to remonstrate, but Thyrza was not to be moved from her purpose, and Alice went up to read history and work sums, and practise, in a manner not quite so satisfactory as it might have been had lessons come at their usual time.

"Is Mr. Stevens about?" asked Mrs. Chamberlaine of the parlour-maid at lunch; Mr. Stevens being the landlord's agent, and likely to be at the Hollies.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, ask him to be kind enough to call presently. I must speak to him about the repairs," she said afterwards.

"And perhaps he can tell you something about the people," said Sophy.

This was just what Mrs. Chamberlaine intended, only she put the repairs first.

"You see," she said presently, when Mr. Stevens was entering into his note-book—"Mem. — slates off roof at Rosebank," "it does not do to neglect these things; we may have fine weather for some time to come, but still it is scarcely wise to wait; one never knows."

No argument was needed to convince the

agent that defective roofs ought to be attended to, but Mrs. Chamberlaine wished to speak of something else that had nothing to do with repairs, and so she made the most of the introductory subject of business.

"Who are our neighbours?" she asked, with the half-apology that it was just as well to know what kind of people to expect.

"I beg your pardon," said the agent, who was examining an entry in his note-book, the words of which he had, in his hurry, so abbreviated that they were not intelligible even to himself.

"I was only wondering whether we might expect pleasant neighbours or the reverse."

"Oh, very pleasant, undoubtedly, I should say. Not a large family; three or four, I think. Mr. Leslie is on the Stock Exchange."

"Oh," was all Mrs. Chamberlaine said, and she returned to the state of the roof. But Mr. Stevens' communication had acted as a passport to friendliness at least, if not friendship, for Mr. Chamberlaine had been on the Stock Exchange too.

"They are come, I believe," said Sophy a week later, at breakfast; "I saw two gentlemen, an old one and a young one, in the garden before I came down."

"What were they like?" asked Thyrza, who had been quite as interested as the rest in the arrival of the new neighbours.

"Oh, the old one was tall and rather stout, with a bald head and a long beard, grey; the young one was decidedly sandy as to his locks, but not so tall as the other."

"I hate little men."

Sophy laughed, and said every one could not be as tall as Percy Graham; to which speech Thyrza made no response, and indeed none was expected, for at that moment the letters were brought in. They were generally on the table waiting for the ladies, but breakfast was an hour earlier this morning, as Mrs. Chamberlaine and Sophy were going to London between nine and ten.

"What's the news, Thyrza? your face expresses astonishment."

"Does it? Well, perhaps I am a little astonished. My aunt tells me that Mr. Fred Sutcliffe (the rector's eldest son at South Walford) is engaged."

"Oh, was he an old flame of yours?"

"How absurd you are, Sophy! nothing of the sort."

"Do you know the lady?" asked Mrs. Chamberlaine.

"Well, I do and I don't, if you can understand. She is the daughter of one of my aunt's relations, and we have written to each other from time to time ever since we could write; but we have never met—at any rate, since we were babies."

"Is she pretty?" asked Sophy.

"You have seen her photograph: it is Emily Gibson."

"Oh, that slim little thing with curly hair and a turn-up nose? Well, she has rather a taking face, I always think. Of course you will write to her?"

"Well, yes, certainly. She is staying at South Walford now."

"And where is Mr. Sutcliffe?"

"In London; he is a promising young barrister; sure to be on the woolsack some day; at least, of course his dear friends hold that idea."

"Good-looking?"

"Quite the reverse; he was the ugliest boy I ever saw; still, he may be improved. He is tall, and has red whiskers."

"I hope Miss Thornton is well," said Mrs. Chamberlaine, always mindful of the proprieties of life.

"Oh yes, thanks. She is supremely happy about Emily."

There was touch of bitterness in her tone, and Mrs. Chamberlaine thought, "Poor girl! it is hard to see the affection which should be hers lavished upon others." She made some kind little answer which had the effect of opening Thyrza's eyes to the fact of her own feeling about her aunt and Emily; but as Mrs. Chamberlaine had misconstrued her tone she did not trouble herself further; only in her own mind she felt very angry at that little insignificant thing (as she was accustomed to think of Emily) being engaged before she was.

In due time she went with Mrs. Chamberlaine and her daughter to call on the Leslies. She was not in the habit of boasting of her expectations, but her friends knew quite well what was in store for her some day. It did not make them any the less kind to her, and the manner of Mrs. Chamberlaine towards her was such that strangers always took Thyrza for a ward, or at least some young relative of the elder lady, and they treated her accordingly. When Mrs. Leslie with the elder of her two daughters returned the call, only Thyrza and the girls were at home, but this only made

Thyrza doubly careful to be all that was amiable and polite, so that she had risen several inches in the good graces of the two visitors before the call was over.

"Such a distinguished-looking girl!" said Mrs. Leslie afterwards to her daughter, "and carries herself so well: I wish, Mary, my dear, you would take pattern by her; it is quite painful to see how you stoop. Now, Miss Bryant is as upright as a dart. That youngest girl of Mrs. Chamberlaine's is a delicate-looking little thing, and not at all like a child. Perhaps Effie may do her good, and put some life into her. I think we are really fortunate to have such neighbours. I particularly like Miss Bryant."

"Did not Mrs. Graham say something about her being an orphan with a fortune in prospect?"

"Yes; her guardian is not kind to her, I fancy, poor girl! Well, she seems to have a nice easy life there; her pupil looks docile enough, and she is quite in the position of daughter to Mrs. Chamberlaine. But really, Mary, I am not sure in what direction exactly Mrs. Graham's house is, but I believe Peters is taking us wrong;" and she pulled the check-string.

The coachman was not very clear on the point himself, so further conversation was perforce stopped till, after several roundings and turnings, the house was reached.

CHAPTER XII.

"How well you look!" said Sophy, as she stood beside Thyrza watching her put the finishing touches to her evening dress. "That rich dark rose sets off your hair so well, and your dress is perfection, just that soft grey which I like so, but which I never can wear. Shall I do?"

Sophy was dressed in dark blue *crêpe*, with lilies of the valley in her brown hair. She was not so tall as Thyrza, and could in no way be a rival to her, neither was she sufficiently fair to be a contrast; which was perhaps as well for Thyrza's peace of mind. In answer to Sophy's question she took a survey of her *tout ensemble*, and pronounced that she looked quite captivating, and then the two went into the drawing-room.

The Leslies were to dine at Rosebank this evening for the first time, and the girls wished

to make a good impression. Sophy was accustomed to see in every young unmarried man a possible husband, and wished to find out what there was behind Mr. Edmund Leslie's spectacles and sandy locks. Thyrza's thoughts strayed away from the immediate subject to Mr. Graham, who had taken them for another row in his boat this morning, and had asked her to practise his favourite songs for the evening. Thyrza had, at first unconsciously, allowed Percy to be the most prominent figure in her new life, and had only taken his lazy attentions at what they were worth. But since she had heard of Emily's engagement, a jealous feeling had taken possession of her ; not that she cared for Fred Sutcliffe in the least, but she was vexed and mortified that a girl younger than herself should have a chance of being married first. This made her reflect what a triumph it would be if she too could secure a presentable husband ; for it was really too insufferable to think of the state of things. Louisa Sutcliffe married, and Kate, the cowardly girl who had shared that night escapade in the wood with her nine years ago ; Nelly and Alice Gibson, too, and here was Emily setting up a lover ! She woke up to see something marked in Percy's attentions, and made up her mind to secure him. It was not nice of

her, certainly, but then she was very far from being a nice girl in any sense of the word. She was neither sensitive nor refined, and though Percy was as yet the most to her fancy of any among the gentlemen she had met, she would have quickly transferred her regard to some one else if she thought the new comer more eligible. Not that she was at all attracted by young Mr. Leslie, he was too small and insignificant to please her ; besides, he was not so rich as Mr. Graham, and Thyrza dearly loved comfort and luxury. She did not care particularly for his mother and sisters, but that went for nothing, she could put up with them at present, and reflected with pleasure that if only she played her cards well, she could soon, as Percy's wife, lord it over them without difficulty, for he was far too lazy ever to remonstrate. She was lost in a very golden dream when wheels were heard on the drive, and then she roused up and devoted herself to the business of being agreeable to the guests in general, and to one in particular.

"Who is this?" asked Mrs. Leslie of Sophy later in the evening, when Thyrza was turning over the leaves of a music book in search of a song which she thought Percy would like. Mrs. Leslie was looking at photographs, and the book

she had taken up happening to be Thyrza's, she had come upon Miss Thornton's likeness, and her question had reference to it.

Poor Cousin Deborah ! it had cost her a good deal of discomfort to be photographed at all ; and in her simplicity she had not dreamed of taking her place in an album for indifferent people to quiz and criticise as they pleased. She had Thyrza's likeness in an easel on a little table in her room close by her Bible and Prayer-Book, thus holding it among her sacred things, and she had fondly hoped such might have been her own fate in Thyrza's hands. Never was she more mistaken ; but, happily she did not know it.

"That?" said Sophy, "oh, that is Miss Thornton ; she is the lady under whose care Miss Bryant was brought up. I think she has a nice face. What is your opinion?"

"Is her name Deborah?" asked Mrs. Leslie, ignoring the question of looks.

"Yes ; why ? do you know her?"

"I believe so ; something in the face struck me at once, though it is years since I saw her, and she was young then. I should like to ask Miss Bryant about her. Never mind just now," as Sophy was about to call her,

"I think she is going to sing, it will do presently."

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,"

sang Thyrza, with no appreciation of the deep pathos of the song, but throwing a good deal of passionate expression into it for all that, and holding the whole room in perfect silence while she sang. What was her paltry scheming for a triumph over others to the deep love breathing in the poet's words? Yet she sang as if she realised it all, and Percy felt three or four degrees more sentimental than usual; for suppose it was all true, and she had none but blighted affections to offer him! Poor Percy!

"How exquisitely she sings!" said Mrs. Leslie, as the last "no more" died away; "it is delicious to hear her."

"Yes, we are very proud of her voice," said Sophy, without an atom of jealousy.

"Do you sing too?"

"Oh yes, but not like Thyrza; I wish I could. Oh, here she is.—Thyrza, Mrs. Leslie thinks she knows your Miss Thornton; come and talk to her whilst I sing, for I see I am wanted; I shan't think you rude," with a bright little nod to Mrs. Leslie.

But Mrs. Leslie would not commit such a

breach of good manners, and sat patiently listening till the music ceased and the buzz of voices began again. Then she spoke :

"Miss Chamberlaine tells me that this is Miss Thornton, the lady who brought you up ; then are you the orphan she adopted some twenty years ago ?"

"Nineteen last February," said Thyrza, correcting the date, and wishing, with all her heart, that she had kept the likeness out of her album, for she was afraid Mrs. Leslie might be aware of her antecedents. She did not place implicit faith in Mr. Gibson's words spoken on that last occasion of their meeting, or she would have had no fears now.

"You were the daughter of friends of Miss Thornton, I believe ?"

"Miss Thornton has never mentioned my parents to me," said Thyrza proudly, and as if she resented this stranger's interference with her affairs. Mrs. Leslie saw the look, and recollected she had made no explanation, and that therefore her questions might savour of impertinence.

"Excuse me," she said, "I know I may appear rude, but I am related to Miss Thornton, and naturally feel an interest in any one dear to her."

"You are related to Aunt Deborah? how strange! But I never heard her mention you."

"My mother was a distant cousin, and when Miss Thornton's parents died, she took her and brought her up; she was with us twenty years."

"Was she really?" said Thyrza, now quite interested, for she thought there was some mystery behind.

"Yes, twenty years. Surely you have heard her speak of Mrs. Parker?"

"Never in my life."

"Nor of Mary and Bessie?"

"Never."

"It is very strange; but then Cousin Deborah was always peculiar; such an odd child she was, so shy and awkward; and when she grew up she had still the same look; and yet she could show a very fiery spirit occasionally. She never seemed really at home with us, that was the strange thing, and yet my dear mother had taken care of her from the time she was five years old."

"Did you know her Uncle Henry?"

"The old great-uncle who took her away at a week's notice? No, I never saw him. I was from home at the time, visiting my married sister. Do you really mean that you cannot

recollect hearing us mentioned ? I was Elizabeth, or Bessie, as I was generally called ; Cousin Deborah and I were the same age ; one would have thought she would have remembered me."

Mrs. Leslie's voice was quite plaintive as she said this, and Thyrza's prejudice against her kind friend was considerably deepened by the revelation of her evident ingratitude.

"No, I really never even heard the name of Parker ; but don't you correspond ?"

"Since my dear mother's death, more than four years ago, I do not believe any letters have passed between us ; my sister Mary, Mrs. Starcross, used to hear occasionally ; but it is a long while now since she had a letter, I know."

"It seems very odd."

"Well, there is no accounting for the oddities of some people. One would naturally expect my dear cousin would have felt bound to us by ties of affection, not to say gratitude ; but one cannot account for these things. Is she well ?"

"Oh yes, she seems well and happy enough ; you know—of course I don't mind telling you, as you understand about her—she is really very odd. I never could be quite happy with her. That is the reason I am here, you know."

"Yes, poor girl, it is very hard for you."

"Oh, I am very happy here, every one is so

very kind ; but at home I was never understood—it used to be wretched. Of course, this is quite between ourselves.”

“ Yes, yes, you may trust me. Still, I hope you keep up some friendly intercourse,” said Mrs. Leslie, who had reasons of her own for wishing to know exactly the state of affairs.

“ Oh yes, we are on very good terms now we are away from each other. ‘ Absence makes the heart grow fonder,’ you know, and perhaps after a while I may go to Walford again.”

“ Of course all her property will come to you. I understood she had made that sure when she adopted you.”

“ Oh yes, that is safe enough.”

“ How odd it is that I should have met you !”

“ Yes, things are so very extraordinary. I have only had that photograph a little while.”

“ Is it like her ?”

“ Yes, it is very good, I think.”

“ How grey she is ! her hair used to be so dark.”

Mrs. Leslie’s own hair had very few silver streaks in it, and she had a comfortable matronly air about her. The contrast between her and the photograph was marked.

“ I should like to send my love to her, if you

would kindly give it when you write," said Mrs. Leslie ; " it always seems a pity there should be any coolness between relations."

" Yes, I will be sure to remember," said Thyrza.

" You seem to be discussing some very interesting topic," said Mr. Leslie, joining the two sitting in judgment on Miss Thornton.

" We are. You remember hearing me speak of Cousin Deborah, Charles ?"

" Yes, often ; does this young lady know her ?"

" Very well ; in fact, she is her adopted child."

" Is she indeed ?" and he looked at Thyrza kindly.

" She will be a link between you, and that's something : it always seemed a pity there should be any coolness," said Mr. Leslie, unconsciously using his wife's words.

" Cousin Deborah is the only one to blame for that," she said, with some sharpness ; " she dropped us out of her life when she went to live with her uncle, and that was strange after being twenty years with us."

" Did she not do a kind turn for Mary's boys once ?—a good many years ago now, but I remember something of it."

"Oh, that was only right, an act of justice, in fact. Of course, it was what ought to have been done by any person commonly grateful;" and Mrs. Leslie, on looking round, was glad to find that some one else was speaking to Thyrza, so that she had probably not heard her husband's remark.

It was Mr. Graham who had taken Thyrza's attention, and in a minute or two he led her to the piano, where she sang another song, scarcely so telling as the first had been, but still of a nature to check anything like conversation, so that Mrs. Leslie did not allude to her cousin again that evening.

"Come into my room," said Thyrza to Sophy as the two girls were going up to bed, "I don't feel at all tired."

"Nor do I," said Sophy.

Mrs. Chamberlaine had gone into Alice's room. The child lay sleeping peacefully with a sweet smile on the parted lips, and her soft hair like a golden cloud on the pillow. It was difficult to refrain from kissing the dear little face, but her mother was afraid of waking her, and went away after casting a lingering look at the pretty picture she made with the white curtains round her.

"Sophy, where are you?" she said, as she came out into the passage.

"Here, mamma, in Thyrsa's room."

"Isn't it time you went to bed?"

"Oh, but it is so delicious here; the nightingales are singing, and——"

"And you want to talk? Well, girls will be girls, only don't sit up long; and take care you do not catch cold at that open window. Good-night, my dears."

She kissed them both, and then they put out their candles, and sat in the window-seat.

"And what do you think of Sandy?" asked Thyrsa, thus disrespectfully signifying Mr. Edmund Leslie.

"Oh, he is rather nice; but clever I should fancy, and it is a little difficult to talk to a clever man."

"Do you find it so? Well, I think it all depends on what branch of cleverness they go in for. What did he talk? geology, or Darwinism, or politics?"

"Nonsense, Thyrsa! he only talked on general subjects, but he made me feel very ignorant."

"A salutary feeling, doubtless, but not pleasant."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind feeling my ignorance if I had a chance of getting rid of it; but I 't, believe I ever could be wise. But, do you

know, I rather like being talked to by some one who knows a great deal, so long as he isn't bumptious with it: looking up to a superior is a pleasant feeling, I think."

"Do you? I cannot say I agree with you."

"I dare say not, but then you are different from me. You are superior yourself, and know heaps more than I do. I dare say Mr. Edmund Leslie and you would get on wonderfully together."

"I have no desire to try the experiment."

"How persevering Percy is in his attentions to you!"

"Is he?"

"Of course he is; and if you were not blind you would notice it."

"Hush! listen to the nightingales! they are calling to each other and answering; did you ever hear anything like those liquid notes?"

"No; they are delicious. And the scent of the limes, too; could anything be sweeter?"

They sat quite still for a little while, drinking in the perfumed night air, and listening to the music of the birds. Thyrsa was not an impressionable girl, but sweet sounds were apt to touch her sooner than anything else, and she did not speak till Sophy said abruptly, "How very odd

it is that your aunt and Mrs. Leslie should be related !”

“ I don’t know that that is odd, but it is certainly strange that we should meet ; I cannot say she gave a very nice description of Aunt Deborah in her young days.”

“ What did she say ?”

Thyrza repeated the substance of Mrs. Leslie’s remarks, and added at the close, “ You see I have not at all exaggerated my aunt’s peculiarities ; it does seem dreadfully ungrateful of her to take no notice of the people who brought her up. And yet she expects *me* to be grateful, I know.”

“ Did she ever say so ?”

“ No ; she would scarcely do that ; but Mr. Gibson has said a good deal on the subject from time to time.”

“ He is Emily’s father, is he not ?”

“ Yes, horrid man !”

“ Oh, Thyrza !”

“ Well, he is ; and his wife is as bad. I expect they are jealous of me. You know Miss Thornton has no nearer relations than the Gibsons, so that no doubt they would come in for her money if I did not stand in the way ; and so they think they may say what they like.”

“ That is very hard on you.”

"Of course it is ; but I ought to be used to it by this time."

"Mrs. Leslie seems nice."

"Charming ; I am sure I shall like her excessively. But it is rather awkward for me,—she sent her love to Aunt Deborah, so of course I must give it ; but I don't expect she will be pleased."

"I cannot understand about Miss Thornton. To judge from her photograph I should think her very nice indeed."

"Do you call yourself a physiognomist ?"

"That means a good judge of a countenance, I believe. Well, I don't know ; only I have a sort of feeling about people."

"I wouldn't go by it, Sophy ; you are sure to be at fault. Now you think both Miss Thornton and Mrs. Leslie are nice, and you must be mistaken about one of the two ; they can't both be so charming and yet on such terms."

"Oh, I don't see that at all. People may be very good and very amiable, and yet they may see things from different points of view, and so not agree. I don't think they need necessarily be wicked. Besides, sometimes one's first impressions of people are mistaken ; their manners may be deceptive, and so on ; and perhaps I

may not be right in my idea of Mrs. Leslie. Now there are no manners in a photograph; it is simply the face, with nothing but its own self to recommend it, and it must speak truth."

"Spoken like a book!" said Thyrza, ironically.

"But don't you agree with me?"

"No, you remember the Smythe girls at Miss Morris's? Janie was as amiable as possible, and yet she looks a tiger in her photograph: and Frederica had a vile temper, though in her likeness any one would call the expression of her face angelic. You can't go by photographs."

"All the same I like Miss Thornton's face," said Sophy, with a little touch of wilfulness in her tone.

"Oh, well, you are welcome to admire her as much as you please. Perhaps one does not see the charm of a face which one has known all one's life, and become used to."

"Oh, I don't think that. Now mamma's face grows sweeter and sweeter, I think. I am sure I do not consider it the less beautiful because I have always known it; quite the reverse indeed."

Thyrza thought Mrs. Chamberlaine a remark-

ably plain woman, but of course she did not say so, and Sophy went on :

“ There is something so sweet in Miss Thornton's expression. I am quite sure, Thyrza, difficult as you say it is to live with her, that if you were in any trouble she would be the first to pity you.”

“ Pity me !” said Thyrza scornfully, and in the darkness Sophy could almost *hear* the curl of her lip. “ I should be sunk very low indeed before I should care to be pitied. Pity is for fools and weak-minded women, not for people of sense.”

“ Well, then, I am afraid I am not very wise, for I do dearly love a little pity now and then when I need it ; for instance, when I broke my arm two years ago, it did me ever so much good when the Graham girls used to bring me flowers, and say how sorry they were, and all that sort of thing ; and then lots of people came who were not such intimate friends, but who felt for me. I am sure it helped me a good deal.

“ Well, one does not break one's arm every day of one's life. Only the very word ‘pity’ has a contemptible sound to my thinking.”

“ Substitute ‘sympathy,’ then, if you like it better.”

“ That puts people more on a level certainly ;

but don't you think we have exhausted the subject? What did you make out of Mary Leslie? I saw you were very attentive to her."

"She seemed so shy, I could do no less than make much of her; but she was pleasant, I thought; and so evidently did Percy, for when he was not dancing attendance upon you he was talking lazy nothings to her. I pity *him* now with all my heart."

"What for? For being insensible to your charms?"

"Thyrza, you are positively unkind. You know I don't care for him at all. I wish you would not say such things."

"Well, I won't then; but why do you pity him?"

"Because he leads such an idle, aimless life. I could not help comparing him with Mr. Edmund Leslie this evening; there is such a want of backbone in Percy. I am sure it would be good for him to have an object in life instead of idling about as he does. He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"And yet you find it very pleasant when he takes us in his boat up the river. He could not do that, remember, if he had a profession to attend to."

"Oh, I like the boating because it's pleasant

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"You had better read him a little lecture on the subject, as you seem so well up in it."

"I do tease him sometimes, but he doesn't care ; he is too lazy to care for anything."

"At any rate, he does not make a guy of himself by wearing spectacles, as your friend Sandy does."

"What makes you call him by that ugly name?"

"I should have thought the reason self-evident. A man with such hair can expect nothing else."

"He can't help his hair, and I don't suppose you would have him dye it, would you?"

"That would only make things worse ; and perhaps with his defective eyesight he might make a mistake, and we should find him with locks of emerald green by way of variety."

"Girls ! girls ! I cannot let you sit up any longer," said Mrs. Chamberlaine's voice at the door. "Do you know how late it is ? Come, Sophy, we shall have you good for nothing to-morrow."

So the two girls exchanged kisses and said good-night.

"Rather a jolly sort of girl, that Miss Leslie," said Percy Graham the next day. He had joined Thyrza and Alice in their morning walk ; where he had sprung from neither could tell, but he was seemingly rather famous for divining the direction of their rambles, or perhaps it might be only accident ; at any rate, three or four days out of the seven he generally made one of the Rosebank walking party ; and as his sisters were generally with him, there was nothing to find fault with, Thyrza considered.

"I did not see much of her, I seemed so occupied, what with one thing and another."

"You and Mrs. Leslie apparently struck up a friendship, I saw you talking with her for an age."

"Did you?"

"Pray let me into the secret of those lights and shadows on your face which I remarked during the conversation."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well, I'll descend to prose, as my poetry was evidently a bad shot. I could not but observe that sometimes you looked very pleased, and sometimes quite the reverse, whilst talking

and listening to Mrs. Leslie. Have I expressed myself lucidly this time?"

"Mrs. Leslie and I found that we both knew the same person, a lady whose likeness was in my album."

"Ah! a case of 'our mutual friend.'"

"Not exactly, it was a friend of mine and a relative of Mrs. Leslie; but they seem far from being on friendly terms. You have heard me speak of her, I dare say—it is Miss Thornton."

"Oh, that glorious old lady who makes the house too hot to hold you both!"

Thyrza did not resent the style of this speech, she felt no twinge as she heard it; for, according to her version, she had been sadly ill-used at home, so that it was only natural that her friends should think slightingly of her aunt. But she did take up his remark with reference to the reflection on Miss Thornton's age.

"You make a mistake in calling her an old lady," she said. "She is no older than Mrs. Leslie, and you would not apply that term to her."

"Certainly not, but I imagined your ogress was of ancient date; I am very happy to be corrected. What is Alice staring at?"

They were approaching Weston Green, and before the inn, which stood by the roadside

"Here, mamma, in Thyrza's room."

"Isn't it time you went to bed?"

"Oh, but it is so delicious here; the nightingales are singing, and——"

"And you want to talk? Well, girls will be girls, only don't sit up long; and take care you do not catch cold at that open window. Good-night, my dears."

She kissed them both, and then they put out their candles, and sat in the window-seat.

"And what do you think of Sandy?" asked Thyrza, thus disrespectfully signifying Mr. Edmund Leslie.

"Oh, he is rather nice; but clever I should fancy, and it is a little difficult to talk to a clever man."

"Do you find it so? Well, I think it all depends on what branch of cleverness they go in for. What did he talk? geology, or Darwinism, or politics?"

"Nonsense, Thyrza! he only talked on general subjects, but he made me feel very ignorant."

"A salutary feeling, doubtless, but not pleasant."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind feeling my ignorance if I had a chance of getting rid of it; but I don't believe I ever could be wise. But, do you

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"Do you ? I cannot say I agree with you."

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"How persevering Percy is in his attentions to you !"

"Is he ?"

"Of course he is ; and if you were not blind you would notice it."

"Hush ! listen to the nightingales ! they are calling to each other and answering ; did you ever hear anything like those liquid notes ?"

"No ; they are delicious. And the scent of the limes, too ; could anything be sweeter ?"

They sat quite still for a little while, drinking in the perfumed night air, and listening to the music of the birds. Thyrsa was not an impressionable girl, but sweet sounds were apt to touch her sooner than anything else, and she did not speak till Sophy said abruptly, "How very odd

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"Charming ; I am sure I shall like her excessively. But it is rather awkward for me,—she sent her love to Aunt Deborah, so of course I must give it ; but I don't expect she will be pleased."

"I cannot understand about Miss Thornton. To judge from her photograph I should think her very nice indeed."

"Do you call yourself a physiognomist ?"

"That means a good judge of a countenance, I believe. Well, I don't know ; only I have a sort of feeling about people."

"I wouldn't go by it, Sophy ; you are sure to be at fault. Now you think both Miss Thornton and Mrs. Leslie are nice, and you must be mistaken about one of the two ; they can't both be so charming and yet on such terms."

"Oh, I don't see that at all. People may be very good and very amiable, and yet they may see things from different points of view, and so not agree. I don't think they need necessarily be wicked. Besides, sometimes one's first impressions of people are mistaken ; their manners may be deceptive, and so on ; and perhaps I

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"All the same I like Miss Thornton's face," said Sophy, with a little touch of wilfulness in her tone.

"Oh, well, you are welcome to admire her as much as you please. Perhaps one does not see the charm of a face which one has known all one's life, and become used to."

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" We are. You remember hearing me speak of Cousin Deborah, Charles ?"

" Yes, often ; does this young lady know her ?"

" Very well ; in fact, she is her adopted child."

" Is she indeed ?" and he looked at Thyrza kindly.

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" Cousin Deborah is the only one to blame for that," she said, with some sharpness ; " she dropped us out of her life when she went to live with her uncle, and that was strange after being twenty years with us."

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"Because he leads such an idle, aimless life. I could not help comparing him with Mr. Edmund Leslie this evening; there is such a want of backbone in Percy. I am sure it would be good for him to have an object in life instead of idling about as he does. He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"And yet you find it very pleasant when he takes us in his boat up the river. He could not do that, remember, if he had a profession to attend to."

"Oh, I like the boating because it's pleasant

and Percy is never disagreeable; but I should think much more highly of him if he would find something to do. It will be too late if he does not begin soon, for he is nearly four-and-twenty."

"You had better read him a little lecture on the subject, as you seem so well up in it."

"I do tease him sometimes, but he doesn't care; he is too lazy to care for anything."

"At any rate, he does not make a guy of himself by wearing spectacles, as your friend Sandy does."

"What makes you call him by that ugly name?"

"I should have thought the reason self-evident. A man with such hair can expect nothing else."

"He can't help his hair, and I don't suppose you would have him dye it, would you?"

"That would only make things worse; and perhaps with his defective eyesight he might make a mistake, and we should find him with locks of emerald green by way of variety."

"Girls! girls! I cannot let you sit up any longer," said Mrs. Chamberlaine's voice at the door. "Do you know how late it is? Come, Sophy, we shall have you good for nothing to-morrow."

would kindly give it when you write," said Mrs. Leslie ; " it always seems a pity there should be any coolness between relations."

" Yes, I will be sure to remember," said Thyrsa.

" You seem to be discussing some very interesting topic," said Mr. Leslie, joining the two sitting in judgment on Miss Thornton.

" We are. You remember hearing me speak of Cousin Deborah, Charles ?"

" Yes, often ; does this young lady know her ?"

" Very well ; in fact, she is her adopted child."

" Is she indeed ?" and he looked at Thyrsa kindly.

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" Cousin Deborah is the only one to blame for that," she said, with some sharpness ; " she dropped us out of her life when she went to live with her uncle, and that was strange after being twenty years with us."

" Did she not do a kind turn for Mary's boys once ?—a good many years ago now, but I remember something of it."

"Oh, that was only right, an act of justice, in fact. Of course, it was what ought to have been done by any person commonly grateful;" and Mrs. Leslie, on looking round, was glad to find that some one else was speaking to Thyrsa, so that she had probably not heard her husband's remark.

It was Mr. Graham who had taken Thyrsa's attention, and in a minute or two he led her to the piano, where she sang another song, scarcely so telling as the first had been, but still of a nature to check anything like conversation, so that Mrs. Leslie did not allude to her cousin again that evening.

"Come into my room," said Thyrsa to Sophy as the two girls were going up to bed, "I don't feel at all tired."

"Nor do I," said Sophy.

Mrs. Chamberlaine had gone into Alice's room. The child lay sleeping peacefully with a sweet smile on the parted lips, and her soft hair like a golden cloud on the pillow. It was difficult to refrain from kissing the dear little face, but her mother was afraid of waking her, and went away after casting a lingering look at the pretty picture she made with the white curtains round her.

"Sophy, where are you?" she said, as she came out into the passage.

to make a good impression. Sissy was accustomed to see a every young unmarried man a young husband and wished to find out what sort was behind Mr. Edmund Leslie's specious and early looks. Thyza's thoughts wandered away from the immediate subject to the husband who had taken them for another week or two the morning and had asked her to come to the theatre songs for the evening. She had not hesitated, and Percy, who was the most prominent figure in her new life, had not been able to turn his eyes away from her at what was worth. But since she had heard of this engagement, a jealous feeling had taken possession of her mind that she cared for Fred Leslie in the least, but she was vexed and mortified that a girl younger than herself should have a chance of being married first. This made her reflect what a triumph it would be if she too could secure a presentable husband; for it was really too miserable to think of the state of things. The morning after the wedding, and Kate, the only one who had shared that night's excitement, was now nine years ago; and now, too, and here was Emily. She woke up to see some-thing of Percy's attention, and made up her mind that it was not nice of

her, certainly, but then she was very far from being a nice girl in any sense of the word. She was neither sensitive nor refined, and though Percy was as yet the most to her fancy of any among the gentlemen she had met, she would have quickly transferred her regard to some one else if she thought the new comer more eligible. Not that she was at all attracted by young Mr. Leslie, he was too small and insignificant to please her ; besides, he was not so rich as Mr. Graham, and Thyrza dearly loved comfort and luxury. She did not care particularly for his mother and sisters, but that went for nothing, she could put up with them at present, and reflected with pleasure that if only she played her cards well, she could soon, as Percy's wife, lord it over them without difficulty, for he was far too lazy ever to remonstrate. She was lost in a very golden dream when wheels were heard in the drive, and then she roused up and devoted herself to the business of being agreeable to the guests in general, and to one in particular.

"What is this?" asked Mrs. Leslie of Sophy when Thyrza was turning over the music book in search of a song which Percy would like. Mrs. Leslie had the photographs, and the book

she had taken up happening to be Thyrza's, she had come upon Miss Thornton's likeness, and her question had reference to it.

Poor Cousin Deborah ! it had cost her a good deal of discomfort to be photographed at all ; and in her simplicity she had not dreamed of taking her place in an album for indifferent people to quiz and criticise as they pleased. She had Thyrza's likeness in an easel on a little table in her room close by her Bible and Prayer-Book, thus holding it among her sacred things, and she had fondly hoped such might have been her own fate in Thyrza's hands. Never was she more mistaken ; but, happily she did not know it.

"That ?" said Sophy, "oh, that is Miss Thornton ; she is the lady under whose care Miss Bryant was brought up. I think she has a nice face. What is your opinion ?"

"Is her name Deborah ?" asked Mrs. Leslie, ignoring the question of looks.

"Yes ; why ? do you know her ?"

"I believe so ; something in the face struck me at once, though it is years since I saw her, and she was young then. I should like to ask Miss Bryant about her. Never mind just now," as Sophy was about to call her,

"I think she is going to sing, it will do presently."

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,"

sang Thyrza, with no appreciation of the deep pathos of the song, but throwing a good deal of passionate expression into it for all that, and holding the whole room in perfect silence while she sang. What was her paltry scheming for a triumph over others to the deep love breathing in the poet's words? Yet she sang as if she realised it all, and Percy felt three or four degrees more sentimental than usual; for suppose it was all true, and she had none but blighted affections to offer him! Poor Percy!

"How exquisitely she sings!" said Mrs. Leslie, as the last "no more" died away; "it is delicious to hear her."

"Yes, we are very proud of her voice," said Sophy, without an atom of jealousy.

"Do you sing too?"

"Oh yes, but not like Thyrza; I wish I could. Oh, here she is.—Thyrza, Mrs. Leslie thinks she knows your Miss Thornton; come and talk to her whilst I sing, for I see I am wanted; I shan't think you rude," with a bright little nod to Mrs. Leslie.

But Mrs. Leslie would not commit such a

breach of good manners, and sat patiently listening till the music ceased and the buzz of voices began again. Then she spoke :

"Miss Chamberlaine tells me that this is Miss Thornton, the lady who brought you up ; then are you the orphan she adopted some twenty years ago ?"

"Nineteen last February," said Thyrza, correcting the date, and wishing, with all her heart, that she had kept the likeness out of her album, for she was afraid Mrs. Leslie might be aware of her antecedents. She did not place implicit faith in Mr. Gibson's words spoken on that last occasion of their meeting, or she would have had no fears now.

"You were the daughter of friends of Miss Thornton, I believe ?"

"Miss Thornton has never mentioned my parents to me," said Thyrza proudly, and as if she resented this stranger's interference with her affairs. Mrs. Leslie saw the look, and recollected she had made no explanation, and that therefore her questions might savour of impertinence.

"Excuse me," she said, "I know I may appear rude, but I am related to Miss Thornton, and naturally feel an interest in any one dear to her."

"You are related to Aunt Deborah? how strange! But I never heard her mention you."

"My mother was a distant cousin, and when Miss Thornton's parents died, she took her and brought her up; she was with us twenty years."

"Was she really?" said Thyrsa, now quite interested, for she thought there was some mystery behind.

"Yes, twenty years. Surely you have heard her speak of Mrs. Parker?"

"Never in my life."

"Nor of Mary and Bessie?"

"Never."

"It is very strange; but then Cousin Deborah was always peculiar; such an odd child she was, so shy and awkward; and when she grew up she had still the same look; and yet she could show a very fiery spirit occasionally. She never seemed really at home with us, that was the strange thing, and yet my dear mother had taken care of her from the time she was five years old."

"Did you know her Uncle Henry?"

"The old great-uncle who took her away at a week's notice? No, I never saw him. I was from home at the time, visiting my married sister. Do you really mean that you cannot

recollect hearing us mentioned ? I was Elizabeth, or Bessie, as I was generally called ; Cousin Deborah and I were the same age ; one would have thought she would have remembered me."

Mrs. Leslie's voice was quite plaintive as she said this, and Thyrza's prejudice against her kind friend was considerably deepened by the revelation of her evident ingratitude.

"No, I really never even heard the name of Parker ; but don't you correspond ?"

"Since my dear mother's death, more than four years ago, I do not believe any letters have passed between us ; my sister Mary, Mrs. Starcross, used to hear occasionally ; but it is a long while now since she had a letter, I know."

"It seems very odd."

"Well, there is no accounting for the oddities of some people. One would naturally expect my dear cousin would have felt bound to us by ties of affection, not to say gratitude ; but one cannot account for these things. Is she well ?"

"Oh yes, she seems well and happy enough ; you know—of course I don't mind telling you, as you understand about her—she is really very odd. I never could be quite happy with her. That is the reason I am here, you know."

"Yes, poor girl, it is very hard for you."

"Oh, I am very happy here, every one is so

very kind ; but at home I was never understood—it used to be wretched. Of course, this is quite between ourselves.”

“ Yes, yes, you may trust me. Still, I hope you keep up some friendly intercourse,” said Mrs. Leslie, who had reasons of her own for wishing to know exactly the state of affairs.

“ Oh yes, we are on very good terms now we are away from each other. ‘ Absence makes the heart grow fonder,’ you know, and perhaps after a while I may go to Walford again.”

“ Of course all her property will come to you. I understood she had made that sure when she adopted you.”

“ Oh yes, that is safe enough.”

“ How odd it is that I should have met you !”

“ Yes, things are so very extraordinary. I have only had that photograph a little while.”

“ Is it like her ?”

“ Yes, it is very good, I think.”

“ How grey she is ! her hair used to be so dark.”

Mrs. Leslie’s own hair had very few silver streaks in it, and she had a comfortable matronly air about her. The contrast between her and the photograph was marked.

“ I should like to send my love to her, if you

would kindly give it when you write," said Mrs. Leslie ; " it always seems a pity there should be any coolness between relations."

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"Sophy, where are you?" she said, as she came out into the passage.

"Here, mamma, in Thyrza's room."

"Isn't it time you went to bed?"

"Oh, but it is so delicious here; the nightingales are singing, and——"

"And you want to talk? Well, girls will be girls, only don't sit up long; and take care you do not catch cold at that open window. Good-night, my dears."

She kissed them both, and then they put out their candles, and sat in the window-seat.

"And what do you think of Sandy?" asked Thyrza, thus disrespectfully signifying Mr. Edmund Leslie.

"Oh, he is rather nice; but clever I should fancy, and it is a little difficult to talk to a clever man."

"Do you find it so? Well, I think it all depends on what branch of cleverness they go in for. What did he talk? geology, or Darwinism, or politics?"

"Nonsense, Thyrza! he only talked on general subjects, but he made me feel very ignorant."

"A salutary feeling, doubtless, but not pleasant."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind feeling my ignorance if I had a chance of getting rid of it; but I don't believe I ever could be wise. 'But, do you

know, I rather like being talked to by some one who knows a great deal, so long as he isn't bumptious with it : looking up to a superior is a pleasant feeling, I think."

"Do you ? I cannot say I agree with you."

"I dare say not, but then you are different from me. You are superior yourself, and know heaps more than I do. I dare say Mr. Edmund Leslie and you would get on wonderfully together."

"I have no desire to try the experiment."

"How persevering Percy is in his attentions to you !"

"Is he ?"

"Of course he is ; and if you were not blind you would notice it."

"Hush ! listen to the nightingales ! they are calling to each other and answering ; did you ever hear anything like those liquid notes ?"

"No ; they are delicious. And the scent of the limes, too ; could anything be sweeter ?"

They sat quite still for a little while, drinking in the perfumed night air, and listening to the music of the birds. Thyrsa was not an impressionable girl, but sweet sounds were apt to touch her sooner than anything else, and she did not speak till Sophy said abruptly, "How very odd

it is that your aunt and Mrs. Leslie should be related !”

“ I don’t know that that is odd, but it is certainly strange that we should meet ; I cannot say she gave a very nice description of Aunt Deborah in her young days.”

“ What did she say ?”

Thyrza repeated the substance of Mrs. Leslie’s remarks, and added at the close, “ You see I have not at all exaggerated my aunt’s peculiarities ; it does seem dreadfully ungrateful of her to take no notice of the people who brought her up. And yet she expects *me* to be grateful, I know.”

“ Did she ever say so ?”

“ No ; she would scarcely do that ; but Mr. Gibson has said a good deal on the subject from time to time.”

“ He is Emily’s father, is he not ?”

“ Yes, horrid man !”

“ Oh, Thyrza !”

“ Well, he is ; and his wife is as bad. I expect they are jealous of me. You know Miss Thornton has no nearer relations than the Gibsons, so that no doubt they would come in for her money if I did not stand in the way ; and so they think they may say what they like.”

“ That is very hard on you.”

"Of course it is; but I ought to be used to it by this time."

"Mrs. Leslie seems nice."

"Charming; I am sure I shall like her excessively. But it is rather awkward for me,—she sent her love to Aunt Deborah, so of course I must give it; but I don't expect she will be pleased."

"I cannot understand about Miss Thornton. To judge from her photograph I should think her very nice indeed."

"Do you call yourself a physiognomist?"

"That means a good judge of a countenance, I believe. Well, I don't know; only I have a sort of feeling about people."

"I wouldn't go by it, Sophy; you are sure to be at fault. Now you think both Miss Thornton and Mrs. Leslie are nice, and you must be mistaken about one of the two; they can't both be so charming and yet on such terms."

"Oh, I don't see that at all. People may be very good and very amiable, and yet they may see things from different points of view, and so not agree. I don't think they need necessarily be wicked. Besides, sometimes one's first impressions of people are mistaken; their manners may be deceptive, and so on; and perhaps I

may not be right in my idea of Mrs. Leslie. Now there are no manners in a photograph; it is simply the face, with nothing but its own self to recommend it, and it must speak truth."

"Spoken like a book!" said Thyrza, ironically.

"But don't you agree with me?"

"No, you remember the Smythe girls at Miss Morris's? Janie was as amiable as possible, and yet she looks a tiger in her photograph: and Frederica had a vile temper, though in her likeness any one would call the expression of her face angelic. You can't go by photographs."

"All the same I like Miss Thornton's face," said Sophy, with a little touch of wilfulness in her tone.

"Oh, well, you are welcome to admire her as much as you please. Perhaps one does not see the charm of a face which one has known all one's life, and become used to."

"Oh, I don't think that. Now mamma's face grows sweeter and sweeter, I think. I am sure I do not consider it the less beautiful because I have always known it; quite the reverse indeed."

Thyrza thought Mrs. Chamberlaine a remark-

ably plain woman, but of course she did not say so, and Sophy went on :

"There is something so sweet in Miss Thornton's expression. I am quite sure, Thyrza, difficult as you say it is to live with her, that if you were in any trouble she would be the first to pity you."

"Pity me!" said Thyrza scornfully, and in the darkness Sophy could almost *hear* the curl of her lip. "I should be sunk very low indeed before I should care to be pitied. Pity is for fools and weak-minded women, not for people of sense."

"Well, then, I am afraid I am not very wise, for I do dearly love a little pity now and then when I need it; for instance, when I broke my arm two years ago, it did me ever so much good when the Graham girls used to bring me flowers, and say how sorry they were, and all that sort of thing; and then lots of people came who were not such intimate friends, but who felt for me. I am sure it helped me a good deal.

"Well, one does not break one's arm every day of one's life. Only the very word 'pity' has a contemptible sound to my thinking."

"Substitute 'sympathy,' then, if you like it better."

"That puts people more on a level certainly ;

but don't you think we have exhausted the subject? What did you make out of Mary Leslie? I saw you were very attentive to her."

"She seemed so shy, I could do no less than make much of her; but she was pleasant, I thought; and so evidently did Percy, for when he was not dancing attendance upon you he was talking lazy nothings to her. I pity *him* now with all my heart."

"What for? For being insensible to your charms?"

"Thyrza, you are positively unkind. You know I don't care for him at all. I wish you would not say such things."

"Well, I won't then; but why do you pity him?"

"Because he leads such an idle, aimless life. I could not help comparing him with Mr. Edmund Leslie this evening; there is such a want of backbone in Percy. I am sure it would be good for him to have an object in life instead of idling about as he does. He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"And yet you find it very pleasant when he takes us in his boat up the river. He could not do that, remember, if he had a profession to attend to."

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"He can't help his hair, and I don't suppose you would have him dye it, would you?"

"That would only make things worse ; and perhaps with his defective eyesight he might make a mistake, and we should find him with locks of emerald green by way of variety."

"Girls ! girls ! I cannot let you sit up any longer," said Mrs. Chamberlaine's voice at the door. "Do you know how late it is ? Come, Sophy, we shall have you good for nothing to-morrow."

So the two girls exchanged kisses and said good-night.

"Rather a jolly sort of girl, that Miss Leslie," said Percy Graham the next day. He had joined Thyrza and Alice in their morning walk ; where he had sprung from neither could tell, but he was seemingly rather famous for divining the direction of their rambles, or perhaps it might be only accident ; at any rate, three or four days out of the seven he generally made one of the Rosebank walking party ; and as his sisters were generally with him, there was nothing to find fault with, Thyrza considered.

"I did not see much of her, I seemed so occupied, what with one thing and another."

"You and Mrs. Leslie apparently struck up a friendship, I saw you talking with her for an age."

"Did you?"

"Pray let me into the secret of those lights and shadows on your face which I remarked during the conversation."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well, I'll descend to prose, as my poetry was evidently a bad shot. I could not but observe that sometimes you looked very pleased, and sometimes quite the reverse, whilst talking

and listening to Mrs. Leslie. Have I expressed myself lucidly this time?"

"Mrs. Leslie and I found that we both knew the same person, a lady whose likeness was in my album."

"Ah! a case of 'our mutual friend.'"

"Not exactly, it was a friend of mine and a relative of Mrs. Leslie; but they seem far from being on friendly terms. You have heard me speak of her, I dare say—it is Miss Thornton."

"Oh, that glorious old lady who makes the house too hot to hold you both!"

Thyrza did not resent the style of this speech, she felt no twinge as she heard it; for, according to her version, she had been sadly ill-used at home, so that it was only natural that her friends should think slightly of her aunt. But she did take up his remark with reference to the reflection on Miss Thornton's age.

"You make a mistake in calling her an old lady," she said. "She is no older than Mrs. Leslie, and you would not apply that term to her."

"Certainly not, but I imagined your ogress was of ancient date; I am very happy to be corrected. What is Alice staring at?"

They were approaching Weston Green, and before the inn, which stood by the roadside

Alice was standing, looking up at something over the door.

"It is only the old rhyme which the child never can pass without reading, though she must know it by heart by this time."

"Oh, I see," said Percy, reading the words which had attraction for Alice :

"Come in, my dear brother,
Let's comfort each other.
There's rum and good gin
And brandy within,
And cider and twopenny
Fit for a king."

"Triumph of poetry, that," said Percy when he had finished. "What makes you like it so, Alice?"

"It is so very funny, and then it must be so old too, and I like old things."

"Do you? well, it all depends on what the 'things' are. At any rate, I should say you need not study that effusion much longer."

"No, do come, Alice; it doesn't look at all well; besides, we must be quick if we are to get to the common this morning."

"Where shall you walk to-morrow?" asked Percy as they were returning.

"I don't know; perhaps to Claygate woods

Alice finds some charms there—flowers and ferns; I dare say we shall go. Why do you ask?"

At that moment Miss Leslie with her younger sister came in sight. Thyrza felt rather taken aback at their seeing her with Mr. Graham, but she would not show it, and when they met she spoke as unconcernedly as if it were the ordinary rule for governesses to have gentlemen in attendance during their daily walks. The girls turned back with them, so that Thyrza never got an answer to her question. As they parted at the gate of Rosebank Percy said :

"I won't forget;" and then he lifted his hat and was gone.

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